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THE

WARRANT, NATURE, AND DUTIES

OF THE OFFICE OF THE

RULING ELDER

IN THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH:

A Sermon Preached in Philadelphia, May 22, 1843,

WITH AN APPENDIX.

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PHILADELPHIA:

WILLIAM S. MARTIN.

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PREFACE.

IN the month of March last, the Author of the following Discourse received a written request from *Sixty-five* of the Ruling Elders, connected with the churches of Philadelphia, that he would deliver in that city, in the course of the month of May ensuing, and during the Sessions of the General Assembly, a Sermon on the *Warrant, Nature, and Duties* of the office of the Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church. It was suggested, as an argument in favour of such a service, that a plain and abridged view of these topics might reach and impress some minds not accustomed or disposed to peruse larger works.

This request was communicated to him by Doctor William Darrach, and J. B. Mitchell, and A. Symington, Esquires, a Committee of the whole body, in terms which evinced a degree of zeal for the increased activity, and enlarged usefulness of the Eldership of our beloved Church, which could not fail to make a deep impression on a mind imbued with any sensibility in regard to this important subject.

With such a request, coming from a body of brethren so eminently worthy of Christian

respect and affection, it was impossible for the author to refuse compliance. Although he had, more than ten years before, published a larger volume on the same subject; and although his advanced age, and growing infirmities might, perhaps, have warranted an apology for declining any new service; yet he felt constrained not to shrink from any labour, by which any of his brethren supposed he might do some good, however small, to the Church of God.

He, therefore, attempted to execute the task solicited of him. The attempt was indulgently and kindly received. And the brethren who requested that the discourse might be delivered, soon united in a request communicated by the same fraternal, and respectful Committee, that a copy might be furnished for publication. On this second request, it will be perceived, that it has not been thought proper to put a negative. Small and humble as the effort is, may the Great Head of the Church render it in some degree useful!

PRINCETON, *August 18, 1843.*

R U L I N G E L D E R S

IN THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

Let the Elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.—1 TIMOTHY v. 17.

IN every regularly organized congregation, in the apostolic age, there were three classes of officers; the Bishop or Pastor, who was authorized to preach the Gospel, and to administer sacraments; a bench of Elders, chosen by the members of the church from among their own number, to assist in the inspection and government of the church; and a body of Deacons, who were set apart to take care of the poor, and to “serve tables,” that is the *money-tables* of the church.


The title of Elder in the New Testament economy was taken from the ancient dispensation. Among the descendants of Abraham, and, indeed, among the eastern nations generally, men considerably advanced in life were

commonly chosen to office, because among the aged were most apt to be found wisdom and experience. And hence, in process of time, the term Elder, or Presbyter—a term of precisely the same import in another language—began to be employed as a title of office generally. In every department of society, civil and ecclesiastical, the leading men in authority were almost everywhere styled Elders—Elders of cities, Elders in every department of society, in which government was required.

When the synagogues were established in Judea, this title was invariably applied to one class of their officers. The synagogues were the parish-churches of the Jews, before the coming of Christ; and all the first Christians being Jews, had been accustomed to their worship and order. The service of the Temple was ceremonial in its whole character, and was now drawing to a close; but the service of the synagogue was throughout moral, adapted to all times and places. In every synagogue there was a Bishop, or presiding Elder; a plurality of other elders to assist in government; and another body of grave, pious men to superintend and disburse

the collections for the poor. This form of ecclesiastical order was evidently transferred from the synagogue to the Apostolic Church. We find the same form of worship, the same classes of officers, the same ecclesiastical titles, and the same official functions in the Church as in the synagogue. In short, the Apostolic Church resembled the synagogue model in almost every point; while it resembled the Temple service in no one distinctive feature. The government of each church was neither in the hands of one man, as among Prelatists; nor in the hands of the whole body of the communicants, as among Independents; but in the hands of the wisest and most pious of the communicants chosen, upon the representative principle, to preside over the whole body.

The office of Bishop or Pastor is declared in our form of government to be the highest office in the church. It is precisely the same office which the apostles and other primitive ministers of the gospel bore, when considered independently of the power of inspiration and of working miracles, in the possession of which those holy men had no successors. Pastors, in those times of simple purity, were



called, interchangeably, Bishops and Elders. Nay, the apostles themselves, with all their extraordinary powers, did not disdain to apply the title of Elder to themselves. Hence, the Apostle Peter, in the fifth chapter of his first Epistle, says, "The Elders which are among you, I exhort, who am also an Elder."

The next class of officers in the apostolic church were the Ruling Elders, described in our text. They were called Elders as well as the Pastors; but were Elders of a different order, and were charged with different functions. "Let the Elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine." The double honour of which the apostle here speaks, has been supposed by some to refer to temporal support, or salary; and it cannot be denied that the original word does sometimes bear this meaning. But it rather seems in this place to refer to that respect or reverence which is due to the office in question. There appears to be a comparison intended between this class of officers, and the widows mentioned in a preceding verse in the same chapter. "Honour widows that are widows

indeed;" but "let the Elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour;" that is, let them be counted worthy of greater honour than widows; but especially such of them as are public teachers, who "labour in the word and doctrine." These are to be counted worthy of higher honour still, and to be regarded as holding a more important station in the church of God than those who assist in ruling only.

The questions which lie before us for discussion, agreeably to the request of those who have called me to this exercise, are the following:—

I. What is our warrant for the office of Ruling Elder?

II. What is the nature of the office? and

III. What are the duties of those who bear it?

I. Our warrant for this class of officers is made out from the following considerations; viz.

(1.) There was such a class of officers in the Jewish synagogue, after which the apostolic church was modeled. I am aware, indeed, that in regard to the Elders of the Jewish synagogue, a variety of questions may be

asked which we are not able definitely to answer. As, for example, whether there was a difference of order among them? Whether some were teachers as well as rulers, and others rulers only? Whether there was any diversity in their ordination, &c? With respect to these questions, some of the greatest masters of Jewish antiquities have long differed, and continue to differ in opinion. But the learned on this subject are all agreed in regard to one point, viz. that in every synagogue there was a bench of Elders, consisting of at least three persons, who were charged with the whole inspection, government, and discipline of the synagogue; who, as a court or bench of rulers, received, judged, censured, and excluded members, and, in a word, performed every judicial act, necessary to the regularity, purity, and welfare of the congregation. Accordingly, we find many passages in the New Testament history which evidently refer to these Ruling Elders, as belonging to the old economy, and which admit, it would appear, of no other interpretation than that which supposes their existence, and their function

as being those which have been stated.* And some of the best authorities in regard to this matter assure us that a portion, at least, of these Elders were not preachers; did not stately or ordinarily “labour in the word and doctrine,” but were, in a great measure, if not entirely, confined to ruling. But,

(2.) We find such a class of officers as I have described distinctly pointed out in Scripture, as actually existing in the New Testament Church. We read, in the history of the apostolic church, that, by divine direction, Elders—a plurality of Elders—were ordained in every church.† Now it is not at all credible, considering the scarcity of ministers, and the pressing wants of the great harvest field, at that time, that the apostles appointed a plurality of preachers in every church. Even at the present day, and in the most amply supplied parts of the church, there is commonly but one preacher in each congregation. Again, we are told in several Scriptures, that infinite Wisdom set in the Church, beside pastors and teachers, helps and governments; by which expressions we

* See Mark v. 22. Acts xiii. 15.

† Acts xiv. 23. Titus i. v. Acts xx. 17.

can scarcely fail to understand certain persons set apart to aid, to “help” the pastors in inspecting and governing the Church. And in our text there is a still more distinct and undoubted reference to such a class of officers. “Let the Elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.” In reading these words, how is it possible to doubt that the apostle speaks of two sorts of Elders—some who were teachers as well as rulers; and others who were rulers only? And is it not equally plain that he means to tell us, that, although both sorts of Elders were worthy of double honour, that is, of higher honour than widows, yet that those who “laboured in the word and doctrine,” held a higher office, and were worthy of more honour than those who ruled only.*

The learned and venerable Dr. Owen gives his opinion of the import of this passage in the most pointed language. “This is a text,” says he, “of incontrollable evidence, if it had any thing to conflict withal but prejudice and interest. A rational man, who is unprejudiced, who never heard of

* See Appendix, note A.

the controversy about Ruling Elders, can hardly avoid an apprehension that there are two sorts of Elders, some who "labour in the word and doctrine," and some who do not do so. The truth is, it was interest and prejudice which first caused some learned men to strain their wits to find out evasions from the evidence of this testimony. Being found out, some others, of meaner abilities, have been entangled by them. There are Elders, then, in the Church. There are or ought to be in every church. With these Elders the whole rule of the Church is entrusted."*

(3.) When we turn from the New Testament to the early history of the Church, we still find satisfactory evidence that this class of officers was, for many years, retained in every Christian assembly. Ignatius, one of the earliest of the uninspired fathers, represents all the churches to which he wrote letters, as having each, besides its Bishop or Pastor, a bench of Elders, whom he calls the Sanhedrim of the Church, and whom he requires to be consulted in all ecclesiastical affairs. The same class of officers is evi-

* True nature of a Gospel Church, chap. vii. p. 141, 143.

dently alluded to, on a variety of occasions, by Cyprian, by Origen, and by several other fathers of the third and fourth centuries. Nor are they merely alluded to. Their existence is not only recognized with great distinctness; but the functions ascribed to them are plainly those which the Scriptures and our own truly primitive and apostolical Church designate as theirs. But the testimony of Ambrose, who lived in the fourth century, is so clear and undoubted as to render it worthy of being particularly cited. "The synagogue," says he, "and afterwards the Church, had a class of Elders without whose counsel nothing was done in the Church; which class, by what negligence it grew into disuse I know not, unless, perhaps, by the sloth, or rather by the pride of the teachers, who alone wished to appear something." Here is evidently a class of Elders designated by Ambrose, which had in a great measure ceased to exist in the fourth century. But we know that preaching Presbyters or Elders had not then ceased to exist, or even become at all diminished in number. But as the Church had then become deplorably corrupt, and especially as

discipline had become unpopular, and was passing away, that class of Elders which had been especially charged with discipline, became ashamed of their office, aspired to be preachers, and thus, gradually, caused that class of officers to fall into disuse in the Church.*

What strikingly confirms this statement is, the undoubted record found in a number of the fathers of the first three or four centuries, that the Bishop or Pastor of each church was the only stated preacher; that the Elders of his church never preached unless he was absent, or in his presence at his particular request. Surely the Elders of whom this might be said could not have been like the teaching Elders of that time, or of the present age, who are known to all to have been set apart for the express purpose of preaching the Gospel as their stated employment.

(4.) A further consideration, showing our warrant for the office of Ruling Elder, is found in the example of the Waldenses, and other witnesses for the truth, who almost alone maintained the true Gospel and a pure

* See Appendix, note B.

church during the dark ages; and also in the practice of the leading Protestant Reformers, when the Church emerged from the darkness of the Papacy. These all, with remarkable unanimity, concurred in maintaining, not only the usefulness and importance, but also the divine right of the office in question, constantly appealing to the word of God for its warrant. Most of these holy men actually introduced Ruling Elders into their churches; and even some of those who did not do this, explicitly acknowledged both their importance and their scriptural authority, and lamented the want of them, as unfriendly to the exercise of wholesome church discipline. Some have said, indeed, that Calvin invented this class of officers. But no well informed person would venture to make such an assertion. For, beside that they are manifestly described and authorized in Scripture, it is well known that they had been actually in use among the Bohemian Brethren, as well as among other branches of the Waldensian churches, long before Calvin was born; and that he appeals to the word of God as his authority for introducing them into Geneva. Nothing is more certain

than that that illustrious reformer did not consider himself as the inventor of the office in question ; but that he refers it to a divine warrant, and acknowledges that faithful men had gone before him in restoring and maintaining it.*

(5.) I will only add, once more, that we may derive an argument in favour of this class of officers from their absolute necessity to the maintenance of scriptural discipline in the Church. Without discipline there may be a congregation, but there cannot be a Church. Unless the professing family of Christ be so instructed, regulated and governed, as that evangelical truth and holiness be maintained, together with the worship and ordinances which God hath appointed in his word, the great ends for which the Church was established by her Divine Head will fail. She is a "garden," fenced around ; and the more perfect her enclosure and her spiritual cultivation, the better she obeys her Lord, and the more fully she answers the great end of her institution. In short, unless the flock of Christ be watched over, and the errors and

* See Appendix, note C.

disorders of her members be corrected, and her offences be removed, instead of being a blessing, she will be an offence and a curse to all around her. But how shall this discipline, so important and vital to the best interests of Zion, be maintained? Shall it be conducted by the Pastor alone? This is physically impossible. That he should do all that is incumbent upon him in “feeding the people with knowledge and with understanding,” and, to this end, “give himself to reading,” and to all that is connected with the faithful discharge of the duties of the study and the pulpit; and, at the same time, be every where, know every thing, and take upon himself the inspection, and regulation of all the spiritual interests of the congregation, widely extended, and pressingly demanding daily and hourly attention—every reflecting mind perceives to be impossible. But even if the Pastor were able himself ever so fully and adequately to accomplish this work, ought he to be willing to undertake it? and if he were willing, would it be wise to commit it into his hands alone? We know that ministers are subject to the same frailties and imperfections as other men. We know,

too, that a love of pre-eminence and of power is not only natural to them in common with others; but that this principle, very early after the days of the Apostles, began to manifest itself as the reigning sin of ecclesiastics, and produced, first Prelacy, and afterwards Popery, which has so long, and so ignobly enslaved the Church of Christ. Does not this plainly show the folly and danger of yielding undefined power to pastors alone? Is it wise or safe to constitute any one man, however pious, a sovereign ruler over a whole church? Would any prudent Pastor feel comfortable in the consciousness that he was the sole inspector and judge of all his Church members, and that their standing was entirely in his hands? Would not such a position be apt to exert an unhappy influence on his own spirit? And even if this were not the result, would not jealousy of him and suspicion be apt to arise in the minds of others, thus diminishing his power to promote the welfare of his flock?

How, then, shall pure and impartial discipline be maintained? The Pastor cannot be expected to conduct it alone. If not, who shall assist him? Shall the whole body of

the communicants be the inspectors and rulers of themselves? No one can think of the want of knowledge, wisdom and prudence in the mass of church members, without perceiving that the maintenance of enlightened, wise and scriptural discipline in their hands would be altogether hopeless. Shall a select number of the most wise and pious be chosen and constituted a committee, to advise and assist the Pastor in conducting this important and delicate business? Would not such committee-men be Ruling Elders in disguise; thus, at once, practically acknowledging that they cannot be dispensed with, and yet denying that there is any scriptural warrant for them? The truth is, the practice of almost all denominations who reject the office of Ruling Elders in theory, contradicts that theory, and recognizes the necessity of some aid to the Pastor in his work as "Overseer," by means of select individuals. It follows, then, that discipline, all important and vital as it is, cannot be conducted in an edifying manner without some expedient by which a few of the communicants are constituted counsellors or helps of the Pastor in presiding over it. Where there is no such

bench of counsellors the inspection and moral regulation of the Church, must be either lamentably neglected, or conducted in a capricious and inadequate manner, as is notoriously the case in all those churches in which the office in question is unknown, and no substitute for it provided. Now, is it probable, can it be believed, that the all-wise King and Head of his Church should entirely overlook this necessity for such an office, and make no provision for it? It is not credible. We might, then, either suppose that such an office as that in question was divinely appointed; or that means, acknowledged by the practice of all to be indispensable in conducting the best interests of the Church were forgotten or neglected by her all-wise Head and Lord. Surely the latter cannot be imputed to infinite Wisdom.

Such are the arguments by which we are conducted to the conclusion that the office of Ruling Elder is appointed by God, and ought to be found in every church.* Let us next,

I. Attend to the nature of the office. The essential nature of the office of which we now

* See Appendix, note B.

— speak is that of an ecclesiastical Ruler. “He that ruleth, let him do it with diligence,” is the summary of his appropriate functions, as laid down in Scripture. The Teaching Elder is indeed also a ruler. In addition to this, however, he is called to preach the Gospel, and administer sacraments. But the particular department assigned to the Ruling Elder, is to co-operate with the Pastor of the flock in spiritual inspection and government. The Scriptures, as we have seen, speak not only of “Pastors” and “Teachers,” but also of “helps,” “governments,” or of “helps in government;” of “Elders that rule well, but do not labour in the word and doctrine.”

It is, in the nature of things, desirable, and indeed highly important, that there be, in every church, a class of officers between the Pastor and the body of the people. Were none but Pastors vested with the power of inspecting and bearing rule in the Church, they might, and probably would, as before stated, become objects of jealousy and suspicion on the part of the people. But where there is, in every congregation, a bench of Elders, or of grave and enlightened Senators, chosen from among the private members of

the Church, and having originally the same feelings and interests with them, associated with the Pastors, to consult and co-operate with them in watching over and governing the flock of Christ, we may expect, under the divine blessing, all that harmony of counsel, and all that decision and vigour of regulation, which are so desirable and important in building up the Church of God.

An intelligent and faithful Eldership, is, on the one hand, one of the most efficient barriers against clerical ambition and encroachment, that can well be imagined; and on the other, one of the most powerful stimulants, as well as aids, to clerical industry and fidelity, that the great Head of the Church ever introduced into his organized body.

The Elders in each church are to be considered as representing the body of the communicants, and as chosen, under the authority of Christ, to act in their behalf. And, as judges and magistrates, in the State, are invested with an important office, and bear in their persons something of the dignity of that community which they represent and serve; so the Church, being a community of still more sacred and precious character, those

who are set apart to serve her, and act as her representatives, have a high trust committed to them, and bear an honour and an authority second only to the authority and the honour borne by those “who labour in the word and doctrine,” and are authorized to administer the sacramental seals of Jehovah’s house and covenant.

Ruling Elders, then, are by no means intended to serve as an ecclesiastical convenience or pageant ; but are appointed to fill a most important station, and to serve the Church of God in her most precious interests. They are, in fact, the Church herself, in her representative body ; just as the acts of the legislative body of a political community, are said to be the acts of the people of the State acting by their constitutional organs. The Ruling Elder, no less than the Teaching Elder, or Pastor, is to be considered as acting under the authority of Christ, in all that he rightly does. If his office is appointed by the great Head of the Church ; if it is an ordinance of Jesus Christ just as much as that of the ministers of the Gospel ; then the former, equally with the latter, is Christ’s officer. He has a right to speak and act in Christ’s name ;

and the members of the Church are just as much bound to sustain, honour and obey him, as they are to honour any other officer or ordinance of the Divine Redeemer.

To the Church Session, or Eldership, is committed the spiritual inspection and government of each congregation. In this body every Elder has an equal voice with the Pastor, and, of course, equal responsibility. And, as in this parochial Presbytery, if I may so term it, the Elders have a majority, it is evident that a most important amount of power is committed to them, and that, on the wise and faithful exercise of this power the prosperity of the cause of Christ may be said, under God, essentially to depend. Their office not only enables, but solicits and constrains them to be constantly employed in watching over the flock of Christ, and in various ways promoting its knowledge, purity, edification, and comfort.

It has been made a question, whether this class of church officers ought to be styled Laymen, Lay-Elders, or not? It is very certain that in the second, third, and fourth centuries, the term "clergy" was applied to all Church officers; not only the Pastors, but also the Ru-

ling Elders, the Deacons, and even the Readers, were all styled Clergy, as distinguished from the Laity. And, although the whole subject of titles in the Church of God is of very small importance, not worth contending about; although I would never spend a moment in pleading for a word—not even for the application of the term Clergy at all to the ministers of the Gospel, since it is a term of human courtesy alone, rather than of divine prescription; yet as a distinction ought, undoubtedly, to be kept up between the mass of the church members and their spiritual officers;—my judgment is, that they ought not to be styled Lay-Elders; but that they ought, agreeably to early usage, to be considered and styled Ruling Elders, or called by some name expressive of their spiritual office in the house of God, and distinguishing them from the mass of the private members of the Church.

From the nature of this office we may gather the qualifications which are essentially desirable and necessary for the discharge of its duties. Those who are called upon to “bear the vessels of the Lord;” to act in the name and on the behalf of the Church of

Christ; to discharge such extensive, interesting, and highly important spiritual functions; whose daily and hourly acts enter so deeply into the order, the purity, the edification, and the comfort of the Church of God;—surely ought to bear a character corresponding with these high duties. Without unfeigned piety, and a taste for prayer and spiritual conversation; without good sense, wisdom, and prudence; without some knowledge of human nature and of the world; without an intelligent acquaintance with the Scriptural doctrines and order of the Church; without some good measure of sanctified zeal, public spirit, and of tender, persevering benevolence—they cannot be considered as qualified for a plenary discharge of all their duties; and the more richly they are endowed in all these respects, the better are they prepared to fulfil the great purpose to which their office looks.

In regard to various questions which may be asked concerning the ordination of Ruling Elders, and the part which they ought to take in the ordination of Pastors, I shall forbear to enter into any extended inquiry;—being fully persuaded that those who have

requested me to perform this service, are much more intent on knowing and performing the duties, than in appreciating the honours, or contending for the prerogatives of the office which they bear. Suffice it to say, that, according to the best of my knowledge and belief, Ruling Elders, with the single exception to be presently mentioned, have never been themselves ordained with the imposition of hands;—and that, not only in the Church of Scotland. but also in the Presbyterian Churches of France, Holland, Switzerland, Germany, and throughout the continent of Europe. That mode of conducting the ordination of this class of officers was wholly unknown, since the Reformation, until recently. It was first employed in the Presbyterian Church in the United States, about thirty-five years ago; and I am happy to say, is slowly gaining ground in our churches.*

But I cannot forbear taking particular notice of a claim lately urged in favour of those who bear this office:—that they ought to unite with Pastors in the imposition of hands in the ordination of Pastors. After the most

* See Appendix, note C.

careful and impartial examination that I am able to give this subject, I feel warranted in affirming, that such a claim or practice was never known or heard of in any Presbyterian Church on earth, until within a very few years, in one of our western judicatories. I say, such a practice was never known or heard of in any Presbyterian Church. Among Independents, indeed, it has been both contended for and practised; as it naturally resulted from their erroneous views of the nature and functions of the office; but among Presbyterians it was never thought of until recently. And as the practice is wholly without precedent, so I believe it to be contrary to essential Presbyterian principle. As the two offices of Teaching and Ruling Elder are entirely different,* of course, no act implying that they belong to the same order ought ever to be admitted. As Ruling Elders have no authority to preach the Gospel, or to administer Sacraments, how can they, with propriety, unite in those symbolical acts which imply the imparting of this authority to others? How can they take the ordained minister by the hand, on his rising from his knees, and say, "We give you the

right hand of fellowship, to take part of this ministry with us?" Is the Ruling Elder ever called a minister, in the language of our public formularies? Is his office ever styled a "ministry?" With what propriety, then, could he take part in such a significant and authoritative act?

Some, indeed, of the advocates of the claim in question, contend that the Teaching and Ruling Elder are officers of precisely the same order, and possess, in every respect, the same rights. If so, then it is evident that every Church Session may, without scruple, ordain Teaching Elders, or Pastors; and if this be admitted, we may bid farewell to the Ruling Elder's office in any thing like its present peculiar form. It was by precisely such an assumption, fourteen or fifteen hundred years ago, that this important office was, for a number of centuries, in a great measure banished from the church. And it appears to me impossible to doubt, that, if the new claim be sanctioned, and allowed to prevail, the same will be the result again. Some contenders for the new doctrine, however, perhaps the larger portion of them, perceiving that the adoption of this principle would be

so serious an invasion of the present constitution of the Church, have forborne to urge its adoption. But if the first step in this innovation be admitted, it is not difficult to foretell that every other will speedily follow.

But perhaps it may be asked, if Ruling Elders may not impose hands in the ordination of Pastors, why are they allowed to sit in Presbytery, and to give a controlling vote in deciding whether candidates for the pastoral office shall be ordained or not; thus in fact, vesting them with the power, in supposable cases, of virtually conferring or withholding the office? I answer, for the same reason, and on the same principle, that the Elders, in a Church Session, may decide, by their votes, that an adult candidate who has never been baptized, shall be admitted to membership in the church by holy baptism, when no one of their number, after giving his vote, can administer the baptism, but must leave this to be done by a superior officer; for the same reason that a Ruling Elder, after giving his regular vote for the excommunication of a delinquent member of the church, cannot regularly go into the pulpit and pronounce the sentence, though pro-

nouncing the sentence be a regular judicial act; for the same reason, and on the same principle, that a Ruling Elder, though to all intents and purposes, a member of the Presbytery, while he actually occupies a seat in that judicatory, and able to give, in his appropriate place, as potent a vote as any other member, yet, as all agree, cannot open the session of the body with a sermon, or pronounce the apostolical benediction at its close.

But, my respected brethren of the Eldership, I repeat, that, as I am persuaded you are far more intent on understanding and performing the duties of your office, than in contending for its honours; so I feel confident that I shall best fulfil your wishes by employing the

III. And only remaining head of this discourse, in pointing out some of the various ways in which it is your official privilege and duty to serve the Church of God.

And here it is evident, that, if Ruling Elders are appointed by Christ to be “overseers of the flock;” to aid the pastor in watching over and promoting all the spiritual interests of the congregation committed to their charge, then a wide range, and a

most important catalogue of duties are opened before them, by the faithful discharge of which they may render incalculable service to the cause of their Master in heaven. So large, indeed, as well as interesting is this catalogue, that it is not easy to know where to begin or where to end the enumeration.

These duties, for the sake of order, may be divided into two great classes; those which devolve upon them when acting in the judicatories, in which their office assigns them seats, and those to which they are called in their daily and more private intercourse with the families and members of the flock of which they have been appointed the inspectors and guardians.

The Elders of every church, when sitting in that body, which we denominate the "Church Session," or which might, without impropriety, be styled the parochial presbytery, as made up of presbyters or elders—have committed to them all the spiritual interests of the congregation, which they are bound continually to consult and promote by all the means in their power. For this purpose they are empowered to take cognizance of the knowledge, and Christian conduct of

every communicant; to admit and dismiss members; to mark, and, as far as possible, to correct, every thing immoral or disorderly on the part of church members; to arraign and try those who are charged with any departure from the laws of Christ; to acquit, censure, admonish, rebuke, or excommunicate those who may be subjects of trial; and, in a word, to concert the best measures for securing the Christian training of the children of the Church, and for promoting all the spiritual interests of the congregation.

It is hardly necessary to say, that as a member of the Church Session, every Elder has an equal vote with the pastor, and an equal right to propose and urge whatever he may think likely to advance the spiritual welfare of the particular flock to which he belongs, or of the general body with which he is connected. Of course, it is manifest, that, whenever a majority of the session are opposed to the pastor, they may control him, so far as acts properly sessional are concerned; nor can he counteract their votes, or carry his point against them in any other regular way than by appealing or complaining to his presbytery.

Every Church Session is empowered to delegate one or more of its members, according to the number of its Pastors, to sit in Presbytery and Synod, there to exercise, in connection with Pastors, all the powers to which their office entitles them. They are not, indeed, stated or permanent members of these judicatories, as ministers of the Gospel are; but each one becomes such, only occasionally, and in virtue of a special delegation. Here is another very material point of difference between Teaching and Ruling Elders. In all these judicatories, however, it is, of course, the right and duty of the latter, in the same plenary manner as of the former, freely to propose such plans—publicly to offer such pleas in defence of them—and authoritatively to give such votes, as may appear to them adapted most effectually to promote the interests of pure and undefiled religion.

When a Ruling Elder becomes chargeable with any personal or official delinquency, he is to be tried according to our system, by the Church Session. But when a Teaching Elder, or Pastor becomes chargeable with any such delinquency, process cannot be commenced against him by the Church Session.

He must be tried by his Presbytery. Yet a Pastor may fall into such negligence or omissions as admit of correction by gentler measures than the commencement of regular, judicial process. In such cases the Session, or individual members of it, are bound, respectfully and affectionately to counsel him, and to do all in their power to bring about a correction of the evil complained of. Nor can the members of the Session be said to have performed their duty with faithfulness, in such a case, unless they have presented to the view of the Pastor, with affectionate remonstrance, whatever in his ministry, they may consider as unfriendly to the spiritual interests of the congregation, and as calling for correction.

But a second class of duties incumbent on Ruling Elders is that large and important class which devolve upon them, every day and hour, in all their intercourse with the members of the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made them overseers. These are so numerous and multiform that no adequate enumeration of them can here be made. It is, first of all, their duty to set an example of holy living, at once instructive and edifying

to the flock. It is their duty every day, and in all their social intercourse, to have an eye of inspection and care over all the members of the congregation; and, for this purpose to visit, and cultivate an acquaintance with every family, and, as far as possible, with every individual of the flock committed to their care. They are bound to watch over the children and youth, and especially all the baptized children and youth, with parental vigilance, studying to know them by sight and by name; — affectionately addressing them on all proper occasions; giving to them, and to their parents, on their behalf, a word of seasonable counsel, and pressing the Lord's claim to their hearts and lives as the children of the Church. It is their duty to regard with a watchful and parental eye all those who, from time to time, become serious, and disposed to inquire concerning their eternal interests; to converse with them; and to give information concerning them to the Pastor. It is their duty to notice, and kindly to admonish in private, those members of the Church who appear to be growing careless, or falling into habits in any respect suspicious, unpromising, or criminal. It is their

duty to visit the sick, and to instruct, comfort and pray with them; and to request the attendance of the Pastor on the sick, when it may be seasonable or desired. It is incumbent on them to assist the Pastor in maintaining meetings for social prayer; to take a part in conducting the devotional exercises in those meetings; to preside in them when the Pastor is absent, and if they are endowed with suitable gifts, under his direction, occasionally to drop a word of instruction and exhortation. If the Elders neglect these meetings, (the importance of which is above all estimate,) there is every reason to apprehend that they will not be duly honoured or attended upon by the great body of the people. It is the duty of the Elders to visit the members of the Church, and their families,—with the Pastor, if he request it,—without him, if he do not;—to converse with them; to instruct the ignorant;—to confirm the wavering;—to caution the unwary;—to reclaim the wandering;—to reconcile those who are at variance;—to encourage the timid;—and to excite and animate all to a faithful and exemplary discharge of duty. It is incumbent on them to consult frequently and freely

among themselves, and with their Pastor, in regard to the interests of the flock committed to their charge ; to aid him in catechizing the children of the congregation ; in maintaining Bible classes ; and in forming and executing plans for the welfare of the Church, and for the advancement of the great cause of knowledge, order and holy living ;—and, in fine, to hold up the hands, and endeavour to extend the usefulness of their Pastor,—by friendly counsel ; by giving him, from time to time, all desirable information concerning the state of the Church ; by praying for him ; and by all the means in their power adapted to lighten his burdens, to encourage his heart, and to promote the efficiency of his labours.

I shall never forget the character of one Ruling Elder with whom it was my happiness to be intimately acquainted in early life. He was born and spent his youth in the bosom of a Congregational Church, but toward the middle of life he entered the Presbyterian Church, and seemed to embrace with perfect cordiality her system of apostolic order, as well as of scriptural doctrine. Recommended by his good sense, his amiable temper, and his fervent and exem-

plary piety, he was soon elected and ordained as a Ruling Elder. He was not distinguished by great wealth, nor by high station in secular society; nor had he any of those imposing manners or factitious arts by which the children of this world know how to arrogate to themselves the honours which men can give; for he was one of the most modest, unassuming and meek of men; but he was, on the whole, among the most diligent, indefatigable, exemplary and devoted Ruling Elders that I ever saw. He was not slothful in his worldly business; but he had many leisure hours, and they all seemed to be consecrated to the cause of Christ. He was, in every sense of the word, a helper to his pastor. He visited and prayed with the sick, with the tenderest assiduity. He was watchful and quick-sighted to discern those who were serious, anxious, or disposed to inquire concerning their eternal interest, and ever ready to converse with and instruct them. He was never absent from the prayer meeting, and always ready to take his part in conducting its exercises. He kept his eye on the children of the Church; made a point of recognizing them

whenever they fell in his way, and of striving to engage them in the service of Christ. He was ever ready to assist his Pastor in catechizing them, and to supply his place in that duty when he was absent. He was vigilant to observe every thing in the face of the congregation which called for attention. When he saw any one who appeared to be impressed by the preaching of the word, he seldom failed to notice it, and, without delay, to pay the individual an affectionate visit. He reproved sin and error wherever he observed them, with a mixture of solemnity and paternal tenderness which was generally received, even by the culprit, as an "excellent oil." He was ever vigilant to discern when a member of the Church was relaxing in diligence, or sliding into error, or evil habits, and to administer an affectionate admonition. He was constantly giving to his pastor some information to guide him, some hint or suggestion to stimulate him, or some effort of co-operation to aid him; but all with a modesty, a humility, and a respectfulness which evinced that he had no desire to exalt himself, but to promote his pastor's honour, com-

fort and usefulness, and to attain the salvation of souls. In short, wherever he was, he seemed never to lose sight of his duty as an "overseer of the flock," and as bound to be a source of instruction and edification to all whom he approached.

When this excellent man was appointed to a seat in the higher judicatories of the Church, he was punctual in attendance, and always ready to take his share, and, when necessary, more than his share, of every burden. He seldom rose to speak;—not because he doubted his right to speak whenever he thought proper, but because he considered all who speak often and long in church courts as a great nuisance, and was desirous of shunning the very appearance of their error. When he did rise, it was always in a manner which showed that he had no desire to hear himself talk (nothing was ever further from the good man than such a spirit); but to give information, or to declare, in the simplest and fewest words possible, why he approved any proposed measure, or was constrained to give it an opposing vote. And in all that he said, good sense, and a

disinterested regard to the Redeemer's kingdom were ever manifest.*

A thousand times have I said to myself, what a blessing it would be to the Church of God if every congregation had eight or ten such elders, gently and affectionately moving about among the people, as guardian angels, full of love to souls,—full of heavenly wisdom,—ever on the watch to do good, reproofing, rebuking and exhorting, with all long-suffering and doctrine! Nay, if every congregation in the land had even one such Ruling Elder, what an amount of good might be done, every day, in promoting the spiritual benefit of the young and the aged, and building up the Church of God in knowledge, faith and holiness unto salvation!

Suppose a congregation to consist of two hundred families: suppose there to be set over it, in connexion with the Pastor, six or eight Elders, in any good degree like minded

* The excellent man here described was Elisha Coit, Esquire, of the city of New York. The portrait may appear to some flattering; but it is drawn by one who knew him well, and who verily believes that he has not been betrayed into any excessive colouring.

with him whom I have just described: suppose these elders to divide the whole parish into districts, and each to make a point of visiting every family within his district as often as he had opportunity; is it not manifest, on the slightest computation, that every family might easily be visited, and every child and young person recognized and addressed three or four times every year? And if we suppose the Pastor to co-operate with the Elders in this work; to receive information from them, from time to time, of those objects which demanded his particular attention, and to visit himself, upon an average, five or six families every week, there would be secured, in such a case, an amount of pastoral inspection and guardian care truly precious, and adapted to produce the happiest effects.

And now, my beloved and respected friends, allow me to say to such of my audience as belong to the Eldership, in the language of the Apostle Peter—"The Elders which are among you, I exhort, who am also an Elder. Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy

lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."*

Let it be your habitual aim, my beloved and respected brethren in the Lord, to magnify your office;—not by contending for its honours;—not by seeking the enlargement of its titles and privileges; not by claiming to be called of men, “Rabbi, Rabbi;”—but by making an higher estimate of the importance of your office; by discharging, with more and more exemplary diligence, prayer, and perseverance its most arduous and self-denying duties; and by striving, every day, to render it more and more practically subservient to the spiritual interests of the flock committed to your charge.

Our lot, my fellow servants in the family of Christ, is cast in an age of mighty plans, and of high moral effort for the enlargement of the Redeemer's kingdom, and for promoting the great interests of knowledge, order, holiness, and happiness in our world. For this purpose we need a greatly enlarged

* 1 Peter v. 1—4.

“ministry of the word and doctrine;” and we are seeking to multiply the numbers, and to elevate the character of those who are preparing to go forth and preach the Gospel to every creature. But we equally need an enlargement and elevation of the office of the Eldership. And, unless I greatly mistake, one of the most important parts of the plan for enlarging the borders of the Church of Christ, and for raising the standard of intelligence, piety, and zeal in every part of the sacred family, is wrapped up in the restoration of the office of our Ruling Elders to the standard of the primitive Church; to the standard which our fathers of the Reformation contemplated when they brought back to the Church the employment of this important office. The more fully this restoration is effected, the happier, in my judgment, will it be for the best interests of our Zion. When our Elders shall, in good earnest, enter into the genuine spirit of their office; when they shall be found cordially and diligently co-operating with those who “labour in the word and doctrine,” in inspecting, counseling, and watching over the flocks respectively committed to “their oversight in the

Lord ;” and when they shall be suitably honoured and employed in their various appropriate functions, both by Pastors and people ;—this change will, I cannot doubt, be, at once, one of the surest precursors, and one of the most efficient means of bringing back brighter days to the Church of God ; by securing a more zealous and active co-operation with the Pastors than we have ever yet seen, in training up the children and youth for God ; and in all those labours of family visitation and instruction which are so essential to the enlargement and edification of the family of Christ.

When the spirit of Prelacy, generated by human ambition, crept into the Church in the third century ; when piety declined ; and when the appropriate work of the Ruling Elder became, of course, irksome and unpopular, the office gradually fell into disuse, and was in a great measure banished from the Church. It seems to have been, for many centuries, retained only by the Waldenses, and other witnesses for the truth during the dark ages. And when, at the period of the Reformation, the office was restored to something like its primitive character and useful-

ness in most of the Protestant communions, it was again banished from some of the Reformed Churches, who fell into the error of the Independents, by mistaking its appropriate design; and by assigning to it functions which it had no right to claim. Thus it is evident, that Prelacy, on the one hand, and Independency on the other, are equally unfriendly to the Scriptural character, and appropriate usefulness of this most important office.

And it is easy, now, my respected fellow labourers in the service of Christ, to destroy the value, and even the existence of your office, by falling either into the one or the other of these extremes. But as long as you are willing to move in that sphere which the word of God prescribes, and which the Reformed Churches generally adopted; as long as you are willing to be “helps in inspection and government” to the Pastors of the Churches; as long as you suffer not yourselves, either by indolence or false modesty, on the one hand, to shrink from any part of your appropriate work; or, on the other, by pride and ambition to affect the assumption of what belongs not to your office;—you will be a great blessing to the Church of God.

Every Elder, if he have a heart, and a decisive zeal for his work, may be as useful as most Pastors. Nay, many Elders may, under God, exert an influence, and confer benefits, in some respects, beyond those of most Pastors. For Elders may sometimes gain access to persons, and enjoy opportunities of doing good, from which ministers of the Gospel are, by their very office, in a great measure excluded. The Elders of the Churches, my beloved brethren, have been by far too long in the habit of leaving to ministers of the Gospel all public and active efforts for promoting the great interests of religion. It is high time to awake to the important duties and privileges which belong to their office. Yes, brethren, when the time shall come, when the great mass of our Elders shall employ themselves, as far as possible, in going about doing good;—in imparting religious instruction, and pious counsel to the young and the old;—in catechizing children;—in conducting Bible classes;—in family visitations;—and in every spiritual work appropriate to their office, both in the Church Session and out of it;—in a word, when they shall, with one accord, devote themselves to

the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom by all the means in their power ;—then may we hope to see better days in the Church of God. Then may we hope to find the oversight and the edification of Christian flocks carried on in a manner nearly approaching to the primitive model, and adapted to render “the household of faith,” in a more eminent degree than the present generation has ever seen it, a spiritual and holy family—a “peculiar people”—among whom peace and love and purity and joy reign. Happy the Elders who may be instrumental in bringing about such a period of glory ; and happy the Church that may be favoured with such a band of faithful Elders ! Then may she be expected to “rise from the dust, and put on her beautiful garments.” Then may she be expected to “shine forth, clear as the sun, fair as the moon, beautiful as Tirzah, and terrible as an army with banners.”

But there are some present who do not bear the office of Ruling Elder. Some ministers of the Gospel ; and some private Christians. To both I would say, make a high estimate of the office of which you have been hearing ; and strive and pray that it may be

turned to the best account for the glory of God, and the welfare of Zion. Pastors! learn more and more to give appropriate honour and constant employment to the Elders of your churches. I have long been persuaded that our Ruling Elders are, for the most part, far less active, and less useful than they might be, and ought to be;—partly, on account of the prevalence of erroneous, or, at least, inadequate views of the nature of the office itself; partly, on account of the indolence, or indisposition of those who bear the office to engage in the whole of the appropriate work which belongs to it; and partly, it may be, because the pastors of the churches, fail to encourage, to stimulate, and to draw them out to their legitimate duties. My reverend brethren in the ministry! so far as you are concerned, let this no longer be the case. Let every Ruling Elder be affectionately encouraged and urged to devote as large a share of his time, and strength, and prayers to the great duties of his office, as he can possibly spare from his secular employment. Assign to each one of your “helps in government,” as far as possible, a field of labour. Give every one of them something

to do; upon the well known principle of “the division of labour,” (which is equally applicable to the work of the Church as to the tasks of secular art.) There is no calculating what may be accomplished by the adoption of this plan. Let no month pass without a meeting of the Session for consultation and prayer; to devise ways and means for promoting the best interests of the congregation, and for imploring the Divine blessing upon all the means employed. Thus armed and animated, every Elder may become a centre of influence as benign and rich as it is extensive. Then, instead of there being, as is too commonly the case, only a single “overseer of the flock,” there may be as many effective overseers as there are Elders, every day occupied in promoting the spiritual welfare of the congregation.

It may be that some of my hearers, and even some who lay claim to the Christian character, after listening to the statement which has been made concerning the nature and duties of the Elder’s office, are tempted to say within themselves—“We would not be Elders for the world!—we could not think, for a moment, of accepting an office so respon-

sible, and from the occupants of which so much is required and expected; so much beyond what we ever imagined before; so much beyond what most elders appear to consider as required of them.”

But why, my Christian friends, should any, who acknowledge Christ as their master, and have any portion of his spirit, indulge such thoughts as these? Is not every Christian, whether a Minister, an Elder, or a private member of the Church, bound to do all in his power for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, and for the conversion of the world? Is any disciple of Christ at liberty so far to consult his own ease or pleasure, as to shrink from doing all that in him lies for promoting the spiritual welfare of all within his reach? The language which I have supposed to be passing in the minds of some of my hearers, when presented in its plain import, amounts to this:—“I would not for the world be pledged to the cause of Christ. I would not for the world accept of an office in which I should be bound to do all in my power, from day to day, to promote the interests of pure and undefiled religion in the church with which I am connected, and among all around me.”

Does this language shock you, as unfit for Christian lips, and as alien from the Christian's heart? Yet it is the very spirit of the language which I have supposed, and, I doubt not, is the very spirit of many a respectable professor of religion, who, though willing to bear the name of Christ, is not willing to take up the cross, and follow Him through evil and through good report; and who cannot feel that he "is not his own, but is bought with a price, and is bound to glorify God in his body and his spirit which are God's." The real Christian feels that he is not at liberty to "live to himself, or to die to himself." He feels himself bound, "whether he lives, to live to the Lord, or whether he dies, to die to the Lord;" in a word, in living and in dying to be entirely and forever consecrated to the Lord. The moment the Christian is imbued with this spirit, and in proportion as he is imbued with it, he is willing to take any place, to perform any service, to make any sacrifice to which the voice of Providence, or the call of the Church may invite him. And if he cannot occupy his place or perform his duties as well as he desires, he will strive and pray to discharge

them as well as he can, to the praise of his Master's glory.

Nor ought it to be forgotten by some, who may be called to the office of Ruling Elders, that though they may not be able, in this office, to serve the Church in all the departments of labour which appertain to it, they may not be at liberty, in the sight either of God or man, on that account, to decline the office. There are those who cannot do much in the details of parochial inspection and visitation, who may yet serve the Church by their counsels, and in judicatories, to an extent not easily estimated. It is, in some cases, with Elders as it is with Ministers of the Gospel. Ordinarily those who are ordained to "labour in the word and doctrine" are bound not only to instruct and exhort from the pulpit, but also "from house to house." Yet we all know that some ministers of the Gospel have such peculiar gifts, and are placed in such circumstances, no less peculiar, that they may fulfil their ministry much more to the permanent benefit of the Church, and to the glory of God, by other employments than by habitual visitation. In like manner, I have known Ruling Elders

who, though, on account of their temperament or their secular occupations, they were able to do little in the way of parochial inspection and visitation, have, by their habitual gravity, prudence and ardent piety, been “ensamples to the flock;” and by their intelligence and wisdom rendered services, in conducting the discipline of the Church, of the most important character. For, although I would by no means suggest an apology for the omission of any duty, on the part of any officer of the Church; yet, reason, experience and the Word of God all conspire to teach us, that different men have their different gifts; and are adapted to serve the Church of God, “one after this manner, and another after that.” Let every one be fully persuaded in his own mind, and “as he hath received the gift” so let him labour.

Let no Christian man, then, who loves the Saviour and his cause, and who really desires to promote the enlargement and edification of the Church, refuse to accept the office of Ruling Elder, when called to it by the voice of his brethren, because he fears he shall not be able advantageously to discharge all the duties which pertain to that office. If he

really desires to serve the best interests of the flock of Christ; if he is unfeignedly willing to do all that his situation in life and his talents enable him to do for extending the cause of knowledge, truth and holiness in the Church to which he belongs; if, in a word, he is willing to throw his whole weight into the scale of the Redeemer's kingdom, it may be said, in general, that he ought not to reject the office, when the suffrages of his brethren in the Lord lay it upon him.

And let all the private members of the Church receive, on this subject, a word of exhortation. Imagine not, Christian friends, that, because you are not Elders, you have, therefore, no duties to perform concerning that important class of Church officers. Your duties in respect to them are more numerous, and more important than you have, probably, been accustomed to suppose. The fact is, that your Elders will be likely to be what your estimate and your treatment of them make them to be. Good Elders will seldom fail to be found connected with a good people; and a good people will commonly be favoured with good Elders. In this connexion, as in all the relations of life, from a

family to a nation, there is a mutual reaction, giving rise to an influence of each on the other of the most essential kind. When we honour officers, then, whether ecclesiastical or civil, and manifest that we expect much from them, they will be, of course, more likely to feel their responsibility, and to strive to fulfil their obligations. Let me say, then, not only to every member of the Church, but also to every member of the congregation, to which Ruling Elders belong, cultivate an acquaintance with them; reverence them as your spiritual rulers, acting as really under the authority of Christ as your Pastors. Acknowledge them, honour them, and take pleasure in employing them in their appropriate work. Encourage them to visit your families; to instruct and exhort your households; and with paternal authority to act the part of "Overseers of the flock." Obey them in the Lord. "Esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake;" and follow them daily with your prayers, that they may be enabled to perform all their duties with fidelity, wisdom and zeal; and that they may be made a rich blessing to yourselves, your households, and the whole Church of God.

When they enter your dwellings to inquire into your state, and to put in God's claim to yourselves and to your children, receive them in the name of the Lord. When you are sick, send for them. When differences or difficulties of any kind arise, consult them, and avail yourselves of their wisdom and authority to compose and heal them. When your children are disorderly and unmanageable, avail yourselves of the wisdom and affectionate authority of the Eldership,—Christ's own appointed agency—to soften and reclaim them. Elders thus honoured, thus received, and thus employed, cannot fail to be a great blessing to the Church of God. O that multitudes of such Elders might be raised up, and fill the land! Amen!

APPENDIX.

NOTE A.

INTERPRETATION OF I. TIMOTHY V. 17.

“LET the Elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.” It would seem that every person of plain common sense, who had never heard of any diversity of opinion on the subject, would, without hesitation, conclude, on reading this passage, that, at the period at which it was written, there were two kinds of Elders, one whose duty it was to labour in the word and doctrine, and another, who did not thus labour, but only ruled in the Church. If we suppose that there was only one class of Elders then in the Church, and that they were all teachers, or labourers in the word and doctrine, we make the inspired apostle speak in a manner

unworthy of his high character as a reasoner. Of this mind was the celebrated Dr. Whitaker, a zealous and learned Episcopal divine, and Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Cambridge, of whom Bishop Hall remarks, that “no man ever saw him without reverence, or heard him without wonder.” He speaks of this passage in the following strong language: “By these words the Apostle evidently distinguishes between the bishops and the inspectors of the Church. If all who rule well be worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine, it is plain that there were some who did not so labour: for if all had been of this description, the meaning would have been absurd; but the word *especially* points out a difference. If I should say, that all who study well at the University are worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the study of theology, I must either mean that all do not apply themselves to the study of theology, or I should speak nonsense. Wherefore I confess that to be the most genuine sense, by which Pastors and Teachers are distinguished from those who only governed. Romans xii. 8. Of

this class of Elders Ambrose speaks, in his Commentary on 1 Timothy v. 1.”*

Equally to our purpose is the judgment of that acute and learned Episcopal divine, Dr. Whitby, in his commentary on this passage. “The Elders of the Jews,” says he, “were of two sorts; first, such as governed in the synagogue; and secondly, such as ministered in reading and expounding the Scriptures and traditions, and from them pronouncing what did bind or loose, or what was forbidden, and what was lawful to be done. These latter the Apostle here declares to be the most honourable, and worthy of the chiefest reward. Accordingly the Apostle, reckoning up the officers God had appointed in the Church, places teachers before governments.” 1 Corinthians xii. 28.

A number of glosses have been resorted to for setting aside the testimony of this cogent text in favour of Ruling Elders. To enumerate them all, and show their invalidity, would exceed the limits to which this little manual is confined. A few of the most plau-

* *Prælectiones*, as quoted in Calderwood’s *Altare Damascenum*, p. 681.

sible and popular may be deemed worthy of notice.

(1.) Some, for example, have said, that by the Elders that rule well, in this passage, civil magistrates are intended; while, by those who labour in the word and doctrine, ministers of the Gospel are pointed out. But it will occur to every reflecting reader, that, at the time when the passage of Scripture was addressed to Timothy, and for several centuries afterwards, there were no Christian magistrates in the Church; and to suppose that the Church is exhorted to choose heathen judges or magistrates, to compose differences and maintain order among the followers of Christ, is in the highest degree improbable, not to say altogether absurd.

(2.) Others have alleged that, by the Elders that rule well, are meant Deacons. It is enough to reply to this suggestion, that it has never been shown, nor can be shown, that Deacons are any where in the New Testament distinguished by the title of Elders; and, further, that the function of ruling is nowhere represented as belonging to that office. The Deacons were appointed to take care of aged and destitute widows, and to

“serve tables,” (Acts vi. 2, 3,) but not to act as rulers in the house of God.

(3.) A third class of objectors contend that the word *μαλιστα*, which our translators have rendered *especially*, ought to be translated *much*;—that it is not to be considered as distinguishing one class of Elders from another, but as marking intensity of degree; in other words, that it is meant to be exegetical of those who labour much, or with peculiar diligence in the word and doctrine. On this plan, the verse in question would read thus: “Let the Elders who rule well,” that is, who labour *much*, or with *peculiar diligence* in the word and doctrine, “be counted worthy of double honour.” If this were adopted as the meaning of the passage, it would go to show that it is for preaching chiefly, and not for ruling well, that Elders are entitled to high honour. But is it rational, or consistent either with the context, or with other parts of Scripture, to adopt this construction? It is also contended, by excellent Greek critics, that the structure of the original will not, without great violence, bear this interpretation. It is not said *οι μαλιστα κοπιωντες*, as would have been the proper order of the

words, if such had been the meaning intended to be conveyed; but *μαλιστα* *οι* *κοπιωντες*; not those who labour with especial diligence and exertion, but especially those who labour, &c. But the most decisive consideration is, that not a single case can be found in the New Testament in which the word *μαλιστα* has the signification here attributed to it. It is so generally used to distinguish one class of objects from another, that we may safely venture to say, that it cannot possibly have a different meaning in the passage before us. A few decisive examples will be sufficient to establish the point. In the same chapter from which the passage under consideration is taken (1 Tim. v. 8) it is said, “If any man provide not for his own, and especially (*μαλιστα*) for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, &c.” Again; Galatians vi. 10: “Let us do good unto all men, but especially (*μαλιστα*) to them who are of the household of faith.” Again; Philip. iv. 22. “All the saints salute you; chiefly (*μαλιστα*) they of Cæsar’s household.” Thus, also, 2 Tim. iv. 13: “When thou comest, bring with thee the books, but especially (*μαλιστα*) the parchments.” Further; 1 Tim. iv. 10: “Who

is the Saviour of all men, especially (*μαλιστα*) of those who believe." Again; Titus i. 10: "For there are many unruly and vain talkers, especially (*μαλιστα*) they of the circumcision." Now in all these cases, there are two classes of objects intended to be distinguished from each other. Some of the saints were of Cæsar's household; others were not. Good was to be done to all men; but especially to believers. There were many unruly and vain talkers alluded to; but they were not all of the circumcision; and so of the rest.

(4.) A fourth class of objectors to our construction of this passage, are certain prelatists, who allege, that by the Elders that rule well, the Apostle intends to designate superannuated Bishops, who, though too old to labour in the word and doctrine, were still able to assist in ruling. To this it is sufficient to reply, that whether we understand the "honour" (*τιμης*) to which the Apostle here refers, as intended to designate pecuniary support, or rank and dignity, it would seem contrary to every principle, both of reason and Scripture, that younger and more vigorous labourers "in the word and doctrine" should have a portion of this honour awarded to

them superior to that which is yielded to those who have been long engaged and worn out in the same kind of service. These aged, venerable, and exhausted dignitaries, according to this construction, are to be, indeed, much honoured, but less than their junior brethren, whose strength for labour still continues. Can this be admitted?

(5.) Once more, it is objected, by some, that the Elders mentioned in this passage, who rule well, do not refer to ecclesiastical officers at all, but to aged men; and that the Apostle means to enjoin simply the paying of due honour to old men—aged male members of the Church—as he had before done with regard to widows. This subterfuge is so palpably unreasonable, that it has been resorted to by very few; and will not bear the slightest examination. Nothing can be plainer than that the word here translated Elder is used a multitude of times in the New Testament to designate an ecclesiastical office. The following Scriptures, among many others, render this fact too plain to be doubted for a moment: Acts xi. 30; xv. 4, 6, 23; xvi. 4; xx. 17. Titus i. 5. James v. 14. 1 Peter v. 1. The Elders here spoken of

are represented as ruling in the Church; but are all old men in the Church rulers; or only some of them, elected and set apart for that purpose? The former will not be pretended. The latter will conduct us to the very principle of interpretation for which we contend. Besides, if the word Elder in the first clause of the verse in question means simply old men, without any reference to office, it will, of course, be considered as meaning the same in the latter clause; and then we shall find the Apostle speaking of old men "labouring in the word and doctrine," that is, preaching without bearing any ecclesiastical office. Either, then, we shall find in this passage, a warrant for lay-preaching on the part of old men; or be driven to the conclusion, that the word Elder is here used, not to designate mere age, but in an official sense, and, of course, that there were two sorts of Elders in the Church when the Apostle wrote, the conclusion to which we desire to come.

A late writer has attempted, with much confidence of assertion, to maintain, that, in the early Church, Presbyter and Preacher were not interchangeable terms; that no Presbyters, as such, were entitled to preach,

and no preachers, as such, entitled, as Presbyters, to bear rule; in short, that the Eldership, as such, never included teaching; that this was always a super-added function; and that it was not, in any case in consequence of his Presbyterian character that an Elder preached.* And such, this writer assures us, is the doctrine taught by Owen and Calvin, with a number of others, whom he names. This is an utter misrepresentation, which, though doubtless unintentional, is not the less delusive and mischievous. Both these venerable men taught that, in the primitive Church, every worshipping assembly had a bench of officers called Elders, or Presbyters; that of these Elders there were two distinct classes; that a part of them only publicly taught, or preached; but that they all bore rule; that the former, in virtue of their office, “laboured in the word and doctrine;” that it was equally in virtue of their office as Presbyters that all bore rule; and that those who, in virtue of their office, “laboured in the word and doctrine,” though on a level with their colleagues as to the point of ruling,

* “Spirit of the Nineteenth Century,” for 1843, p. 621.

were invested with a higher function, and bore a superior office. In short, according to these venerable writers, the whole bench equally bore the name and the authority of Elders or Presbyters, and it was as Elders, that a part of them preached. That they thus taught, would seem to be plain beyond controversy or question. How they should have been so entirely misapprehended is indeed unaccountable.



NOTE B.

TESTIMONY OF AMBROSE.

THIS very unequivocal and decisive statement of Ambrose has been most unreasonably tortured in a variety of ways. The great body of Prelatists, as well as some others, have laboured hard to divest it of its plain and pointed testimony in favour of the office of Ruling Elder. They insist upon it that the pious father had no respect whatever to ecclesiastical officers, but only to aged persons: and that he meant to say nothing more than that, formerly, in the Synagogue, and afterwards in the Church, there were old men, whom it

was customary to consult; which practice, however, at the time in which he wrote, was generally laid aside. This perversion of an obvious meaning is really so strange and extravagant, that the formality of a serious refutation seems scarcely necessary. Can any reflecting man believe that Ambrose designed only to inform his readers that in the Jewish Synagogue there were actually persons who had attained a considerable age; that this was also afterwards the case in the Christian Church; and that these aged persons were generally consulted? This would have been a sage remark indeed! Was there ever a community of any extent, either ecclesiastical or civil, which did not include some aged persons? Or was there ever a state of society, or an age of the world, in which the practice of consulting the aged and experienced had fallen into disuse? That thinking, candid minds, should be able to satisfy themselves with such a gloss, is truly wonderful. It is certainly no argument in favour of this construction of the language of Ambrose, that he prefaces his statement respecting the Synagogue and the Church, by remarking, that among all nations old age is honourable.

Surely no remark could be more natural or appropriate, when he was about to state, that from the earliest period of the Christian Church, and long before in the Synagogue, all their affairs had been managed by colleges of Elders, (a title importing a kind of homage to age and experience,) without whose counsel nothing was done.

But there is a clause in this extract from Ambrose, which precludes all doubt that he intended to allude to a class of Church officers, and not merely to old age. It is this:—“Which by what negligence it grew into disuse, I know not, unless, perhaps, by the sloth, or rather by the pride of the Teachers, who alone wished to appear something.” It is very conceivable and obvious that both the pride and the sloth of the Teachers, that is the Teaching Elders, should render them willing to get rid of a bench of officers of equal power with themselves as rulers in the Church, and, consequently, able to control their wishes in cases of discipline. But it cannot easily be conceived why either sloth or pride should render any so particularly averse to all consultation with the aged and experienced, in preference to the young, on the affairs of the

Church; especially if those aged persons bore no office, and there was, of course, no official obligation to be governed by their advice, as the gloss under consideration supposes. It being evident, then, that a class of officers was here intended, the question arises, what class of Presbyters or Elders was that which had grown into disuse in the fourth century? Not Teaching Presbyters, surely; for every one knows that that class of Presbyters had not become obsolete, or even diminished in number, in Ambrose's time. His own writings amply attest the reverse. And every one also knows that this class of Church officers has never been laid aside, or become less numerous even to the present day.

It is also worthy of particular notice here, as a confirmation of the construction which we put upon the language of Ambrose, that all of the most learned and able of the Reformers, and a great number of others, the most competent judges in such matters, from the Reformation to the present time, have concurred in adopting the same construction, and have considered the venerable father as referring to a class of Elders who held the

place of Rulers and Inspectors. Learned Lutherans and Episcopalians, as well as Calvinists, almost without number, have united in the interpretation of this father, which we have given, with a degree of unanimity truly remarkable. Is it not quite as likely that Luther, and Melancthon, and Bucer, and Whitgift, and Zanchius, and Peter Martyr, who had no sectarian or private views to serve in regard to this point, should be able correctly to read and understand Ambrose, as that moderns, of far less learning, and filled with the strongest prejudices against his real obvious meaning, should be betrayed into an erroneous interpretation? Yet nothing is more certain than that those truly learned and venerable men whose names have been mentioned, and many more of similar character, have, with one voice, concurred in interpreting Ambrose as we have done, and in citing him as a decisive witness in favour of the office of the Ruling Elder.

NOTE C.

TESTIMONY OF THE REFORMERS.

I have said that the great body of the Reformers recognized the scriptural authority of this office, and either actually introduced it into their churches, or lamented the want of it. This is so well known to have been the case with all the leaders of the Reformed Churches on the Continent of Europe, and with almost all those of the Lutheran denomination, that no attempt to establish the fact is necessary here. The proof is exhibited in my larger work on the Ruling Elder's office. Even the leading Reformers of the Church of England formed no exception to this general statement. Both in their writings and in their acts, we find the plainest traces of their convictions, and of their desires in favour of the restoration of this office.

John A'Lasco, a Polish nobleman, and pious divine, who presided over a large body of Protestants in the city of London, in the sixteenth century, and introduced among them the system of Ruling Elders and Deacons, according to the Presbyterian plan, ex-

plicitly declares, not only that King Edward VI. and Archbishop Cranmer patronized and approved what he had done ; but that they expressed an ardent desire that his plan for maintaining discipline should be introduced into the national Church.* In fact, there is evidence, that Cranmer, and the rest of the Commissioners in Edward's reign, did directly propose the introduction of Ruling Elders into the Church of England. They drew up a body of laws, which, though not finally ratified, partly on account of opposing influence, and partly from the premature decease of the monarch, yet clearly show the opinion and the wishes of Cranmer and his associates. One of the proposed laws is as follows:—"After evening prayer, on which all shall attend in their own parish churches, the principal minister or Parson and the Deacon, if they are present ; or, in case of their absence, the Curate and the Elders shall con-

* McCrie's *Life of Knox*, vol. i. p. 392-396. *Gisberti Voetii Politicæ Ecclesiasticæ*. Tom. i. 420-422. *Forma et Ratio totius Ecclesiastici ministerii Edvardi Sexti in Peregrinorum maxime Germanorum Eccles.* Also, *De Ordinatione Ecclesiarum Peregrinarum in Anglia*. *Epist. Dedicat.* et p. 649.

sider how the money given for pious uses shall be laid out; and then let discipline be exercised. For those whose sin has been public, and given offence to the whole church, should be brought to a sense of it, and publicly undergo the punishment of it, that so the church may be the better for their correction. After that, the minister shall withdraw, with some of the Elders, and consult how all other persons who are disorderly in their life and conversation, may be conversed with; first by some sober and good men, in a brotherly manner, according to the direction of Christ in the Gospel; and if they hearken to their advice, God is to be praised for it; but if they go on in their wickedness, they are to be restrained by that severe punishment which is in the Gospel prescribed for such obstinacy.’’*

There is another testimony on this subject from one of the most conspicuous and active friends of the Reformation in England, which is worthy of particular notice. It is that of the Rev. Dean Nowell, who flourished in the

* Peirce's *Vindication of the Dissenters* p. 23. *Reformatio Legum Ecclesiasticarum, ex autoritate Regis Hen. VIII. et Edwar. VI. 4to. 1640.*

reign of Queen Elizabeth, and whose celebrated Catechism, drawn up in 1562, obtained, perhaps, as much currency and respect as any publication of that period. Nor are we to consider this Catechism as expressing the opinions of the illustrious divine whose name it bears, alone ; for it was unanimously approved and sanctioned by the same Lower House of Convocation which passed the thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, and directed to be published and used as containing the true doctrine of that church. In that Catechism, toward the close, when speaking of the evils of retaining unworthy members in the church, the following questions and answers occur :

“*Q.* What remedy for this evil can be devised and applied ?

“*A.* In churches well constituted and governed, there was, as I before said, a certain plan and order of government appointed and observed. Elders (Seniores) were chosen, that is, ecclesiastical rulers, who conducted and maintained the discipline of the church. To these pertained authority, reproof, and chastisement ; and they, with the concurrence of the Pastor, if they knew any who, by false

opinions, troublesome errors, foolish superstitions, or vicious and profligate lives, were likely to bring a great public scandal on the Church of God, and who could not approach the Lord's Supper without a manifest profanation, repelled them from the communion, and no more admitted them until, by public penitence, they gave satisfaction to the church.

“*Q.* What is to be done?” (When those who have been excluded from the Church repent, and desire to be restored to its communion.)

“*A.* That they may be received again into the Church, and to the enjoyment of its holy mysteries, from which they have been deservedly cast out, they ought humbly to supplicate and pray; and, on the whole, there ought to be such moderation used in administering public penance, that neither, by too much severity the offender may be reduced to despondency, nor, by too much lenity, the discipline of the Church relaxed, its authority diminished, and others encouraged and incited to similar offences. But when, in the judgment of the Elders and the Pastor, proper satisfaction shall be made, by the chastisement of the offender, for an example to others, he

may be admitted again to the communion of the Church.”*

To the same effect is the testimony of Archbishop Whitgift, a well known champion of Episcopacy, and a warm advocate of the Reformation, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. “I know,” says that eminent man, “that in the primitive Church they had, in every church, certain Seniors, to whom the government of the congregation was committed; but that was before there was any Christian prince or magistrate that openly professed the Gospel, and before there was any church by public authority established.” And again, he says, “Both the name and office of Seniors were extinguished before Ambrose’s time, as he himself doth testify, writing upon 1 Timothy v. 1. Indeed, as Ambrose saith, the synagogue, and afterwards the Church, had Seniors, without whose counsel nothing was done in the Church; but that was before his time, and before there was any Christian magistrate, or any Church established.”†

The learned and acute Archbishop, it

* See Bishop Randolph’s *Enchiridion Theologicum*, vol. i. 326, 327, 3d edition.

† Defence against Cartwright, p. 638, 651.

seems, was not only convinced that there were Ruling Elders, distinct from Preaching Elders, in the primitive Church; but, with all his erudition and discernment, and, it may be added, with all his Episcopal prejudices, he understood Ambrose just as the friends of this class of officers now understand him.

Perhaps it will be asked, why, if these views of the Ruling Elder's office prevailed among the most enlightened and pious of the Reformers in England, why was not that class of officers adopted and incorporated with the English establishment? This question is solved by the statements of Bishop Burnet, in his "History of the Reformation." He informs us that "many learned and pious divines, in the beginning of Queen Elizabeth's reign, had observed the new models set up in Geneva and other places, for the censuring of scandalous persons, by mixed judicatories of ministers and laity; and these, reflecting on the great looseness of life which had been universally complained of in King Edward's time, thought such a platform might be an effectual way for keeping out a return of the like disorders. But certain wise politicians of that age demonstrated to

the Queen that these models would certainly bring with them a great abatement of her prerogative; since, if the concerns of religion came into popular hands, there would be a power set up distinct from hers, over which she could have no authority.”*

But, though the leaders of the Reformation in England declined to adopt this feature of the Presbyterian system, evidently from secular policy, and not because they doubted its conformity to the primitive model; yet the following is a specimen of the manner in which some of her most learned and pious divines speak of the office under consideration.

The Rev. Dr. John Edwards, a divine of that Church, and acknowledged by all as a man of distinguished learning and piety, thus speaks of the office in question :

“ This office of the Ruling Elder is according to the practice of the Church of God among the Jews, his own people. It is certain that there was this kind of Elders, under that economy. There were two sorts of

* Burnet's History of the Reformation, preface to the second volume of Nares' edition, p. 24, 25.

Elders among the Jews—the Ruling ones, who governed in their assemblies and Synagogues, and the Teaching ones, who read and expounded the Scriptures. Accordingly, Dr. Lightfoot, in his *Harmony of the New Testament*, inclines to interpret 1 Timothy v. 17, of the Elders in the Christian congregations, who answer to the Lay-Elders in the Jewish Synagogue. For this learned writer, who was well versed in the Jewish customs and practices, tells us, that in every Synagogue among the Jews, there were Elders that ruled chiefly in the affairs of the Synagogue, and other Elders, that laboured in the word and doctrine.” “And so it was in the Christian Church; there was a mixture of Clergy and Laity in their consults about Church matters, as we see frequently in the Acts of the Apostles. The Christian Church retained this usage, for which they quote St. Augustine’s 137th Epistle, where he mentions the Clergy and the Elders, and the people. So in his third book against Cresconius, he mentions Deacons and Seniors, that is Lay-Elders, for he distinguishes them from other Presbyters. One of his Epistles to his Church in Hippo is thus superscribed: ‘To the Clergy

and the Elders.’ See chapter 56th, in the fore-named book against Cresconius, where he mentions Peregrinus, the Presbyter, and the Elders (Seniores.)* And nothing can be plainer than that of St. Ambrose—‘ Both the Synagogue and afterwards the Church, had their Elders, without whose counsel nothing was done in the Church, &c.’ Further, we read of these Seniors in the writings of Optatus, p. 41, and in the Epistles annexed to him, which the reader may consult. Thus it appears that this was an ancient office in the Church, and not invented by Calvin, as some have thought and writ.”†

“ And then, as to the reason of the thing,

* It will not escape the notice of the discerning reader that these testimonies from Augustine, Ambrose, and Optatus, which some have ventured, very unceremoniously, to treat with contempt, when brought forward on this subject, are regarded by this very learned Episcopalian, as evidence of the most conclusive character.

† The old and hackneyed allegation, which has been the theme of high-toned Episcopalianism for more than two hundred years, that Calvin invented and first introduced Ruling Elders, it will be observed is confidently rejected by this truly learned Episcopal Divine, who, from his ecclesiastical connexion, cannot be supposed to have had any other inducement to adopt the opinion which he has expressed, than his love of truth.

there should be no ground of quarrelling with this office in the Church, seeing it is so useful. It was instituted for the ease of the preaching Elders, that they might not be overburdened with business, and that they might more conveniently apply themselves to that employment which is purely ecclesiastical and spiritual. Truly if there was no such office mentioned in the Scripture, we might reasonably wish for such a one, it being so useful and serviceable to the great purposes of religion. What can be more desirable than that there should be one or more appointed to observe the conversation of the flock, in order to the exercising of discipline? The Pastor himself cannot be supposed to have an eye on every one of his charge; and, therefore, it is fitting that, out of those who are fellow-members, and daily converse with one another, and, therefore, are capable of acquainting themselves with their manners and behaviour, there should be chosen these Elders I am speaking of, to inspect the carriage and deportment of the flock.”*

* *Theologia Reformata*, vol i. p. 526, 528.

NOTE D.

DIVINE RIGHT OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

SOME persons have hesitated to adopt the opinion that any particular form of church government was appointed of God, and ought now to be maintained, lest it should involve them in the necessity of pronouncing that all denominations of Christians who adopt any other form, are no part of the true Church of God, and are to be considered as out of the covenant of grace.

This alleged difficulty, when properly understood, will be found merely ideal. The opinion, when regarded as it may be, and ought to be, is chargeable with no such consequence.

By the *jus divinum*, or divine right of Church government, is meant, the doctrine, that a particular form of ecclesiastical polity is appointed of God;—in other words, rests on the ground of divine authority. This doctrine is held by different individuals and denominations with different degrees of rigour, and in a variety of forms. A brief sketch of these forms will serve, it is hoped,

to disentangle the subject from the perplexity in which some have involved it.

(1.) The most rigorous form of the divine right of Church government, is that which is held by Papists. They assert confidently, and with one voice, that the primacy of the Bishop of Rome over the whole Christian Church is made by divine appointment, essential to the very existence of the Church: that while Christ is the Supreme King and Head of the Church in heaven, He has appointed the Pope as his sole vicar and representative on earth: that the Church, with the Pope at her head, is vested with power infallibly to speak in the name of Christ, and to declare his will: and that those who are not in communion with the Pope, are not members of the Church, in any Scriptural sense, and are altogether out of the way of salvation. Out of the Papacy, according to them, there can be no ministry; no ordinances; no hope of the divine favour. They regard Protestant Episcopalians, and even the Popish Puseyites, as all in this sad and hopeless predicament; as making no part of that Church which Christ hath purchased

with his blood, and has promised to glorify with himself.

(2.) The High Church Episcopalians, though thus proscribed and denounced by the "man of sin," "the son of perdition," yet, in their turn, urge claims of nearly the same character for their own sect. They contend, with zeal, for the divine right of their form of Episcopacy. They maintain, not only, that diocesan or prelatical Episcopacy was the Apostolic form of Church government, and of course appointed by Christ; but that it is so essential, that there can be no Church without it; that no ministers, excepting those ordained by Prelates, have a right to administer ordinances; that without them there can be no Church; and that those who are not in communion with the Episcopal Church, though they may, possibly, be saved, yet, like the heathen, they bear no relation to the Church of Christ, and have nothing on which to rely but the "uncovenanted mercies of God." They assert, that an uninterrupted succession in the line of Bishops from the Apostles to the present day, is indispensable to the validity of the ministry, and can be historically deduced. This

is the opinion strenuously maintained, by a large number of the Episcopal sect in this country and in Great Britain; and appears to be gaining more currency among the adherents to that denomination, on both sides of the Atlantic. The devotees to Puseyism are especially distinguished by their adoption of these extravagant notions; but they are far from being confined to those semi-Popish apostates from Protestant principles.

(3.) There is a third and mitigated form of the divine right doctrine, which is adopted by large numbers of intelligent Christians, and which is wholly unattended with the extravagance and the difficulties which belong to the tenet just mentioned. The doctrine is, that a certain form of Church government was approved and appointed by the Apostles, and was every where in use in the primitive Church; that as this plan had the sanction of divine authority, we are bound to consider it as the best plan of ecclesiastical order; that it ought to be adopted and adhered to now: but still that this form is not essential to the *being* of the Church, though it is to its *perfection*; and of course, that we may, without hesitation, acknowledge as true churches of

Christ those ecclesiastical bodies which hold fast the fundamental truth and ordinances of Christ, though they may deviate from the form of external organization and order which he appointed. Those who adopt this opinion say, that, as it is granted by all, that an entire conformity to the model of the Apostolic Church, in every jot and tittle, is not essential; and as it is conceded that no church now in existence is in fact perfectly conformed to that model; so there seems no good reason why perfect adherence to that model in regard to ecclesiastical order, should be regarded as more indispensable than with respect to doctrine, or the details of ritual. The advocates of this opinion have been numerous, both among Presbyterians and Episcopalians; and it is believed to be, at this moment, the opinion of some of the greatest and best men in the Church of England, and of a few Episcopalians in this country.

(4.) There is a fourth opinion on this subject still lower in the scale. It is the opinion of those who believe that neither Christ nor his Apostles laid down any particular form of ecclesiastical government to which the Church is bound to adhere in all ages.

They suppose that every Church, like every nation, is free, consistently with the divine will, to frame her constitution agreeably to her own views, to the state of society, and to the exigencies of the times and places in which her lot is cast. They commonly prefer the form of government in use in their own Church; but consider it as resting on the ground of human expediency alone, and not of divine appointment; and on this ground alone they would plead in its behalf. The Rev. Dr. Jortin, a learned divine of the Church of England, who adopted this opinion, embodied it in one sentence—"Government is of God; the forms of it of men."—Many other Episcopal divines, both in former and later times, have adopted this opinion, and, of course, reject the divine right of any form of government in the Church of Christ.

Presbyterians, like Episcopalians, are divided in opinion, in regard to this subject. Some of them hold to the divine right of Presbyterian Church government, in the third or qualified sense; that is, they hold that the Presbyterian form of ecclesiastical order was that which was adopted by the Apostles;

that it is the best form; that it is more friendly to the diffusion of truth, and the maintenance of pure discipline than any other; and that it ought to be adopted every where. But they do not believe that it is essential to the existence of the Church, though it is to its perfection. And, accordingly, they freely acknowledge as true churches of Christ, Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists, and Episcopalians, though they all differ from themselves in their form of ecclesiastical order. No one ever read or heard of a Presbyterian who adopted a creed more rigorous than this. It is easy, therefore, to see that Presbyterians may hold to the divine right, or divine authority of their form of Church government, without a thought of unchurching any other denomination who maintain the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, and have a regular worship and ministry. We repudiate the baptisms of Socinians, and of all other denominations who reject the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and the divinity and atonement of the blessed Redeemer; not because of the irregularity of their external order, but because, on account of their rejection of the essential fundamental faith of the Church,

we cannot consider them as Christians at all. But no one ever heard of a Presbyterian who denied or doubted the Church character of our Episcopal, Baptist, Methodist, or Congregational brethren, though they all of them so entirely “dissent” from us in their forms of Church order.

The author of the foregoing discourse thinks it due to candour to state, that he is himself a firm believer in the divine right of that form of Church government with which it is his privilege to be connected. He believes that the government of the Church, as left by Christ and his inspired Apostles, was Presbyterian; that there is no form of ecclesiastical polity so well adapted to promote the order, purity, and edification of the Church; that it is the duty of all churches to adopt it; and that Prelacy, on the one hand, and Independency on the other, have both unhappily departed from the truly primitive and Apostolical model. Yet he would be shocked at the thought of unchurching either of these denominations, or of questioning the validity of their ordinances.

I am aware that in holding the divine right of that form of government which our Church

has adopted, I differ from many of the beloved and respected ministers of my own denomination, who do not believe that any precise form of external order was intended to be laid down in the New Testament Scriptures. They decisively prefer the Presbyterian, and consider it as, in every respect, better suited than any other to the welfare of the Church; and some of them believe that it was, in fact, adopted by the Apostles; but they do not rest their arguments in its favour on the ground of divine authority. How large a portion of our Ministers and Elders occupy this ground is uncertain; but one thing is unquestionable, that no Minister, Elder, or member of our communion is chargeable with holding any opinions on this subject which go to unchurching other evangelical denominations. I say, evangelical denominations; for we profess to harmonize with apostolical principle, and with the uniform spirit of the true Church in all ages, in believing that Gospel doctrine is far more important than external order; that the purity of truth, by which men are sanctified, is a far more essential element in con-

stituting a true Church of Christ than the form of its government can possibly be.

The opinion on this subject avowed in our public formularies, is marked, at once, by that firmness, and that charity which it were to be wished might be every where acknowledged and received. It is expressed in these words: "It is absolutely necessary that the government of the Church be exercised under some certain and definite form. And we hold it to be expedient and agreeable to Scripture, and the practice of the primitive Christians, that the Church be governed by Congregational, Presbyterial and Synodical Assemblies. In full consistency with this belief, we embrace in the spirit of charity those Christians who differ from us, in opinion, or in practice, on these subjects." (Form of Government, chapter viii. sec. i.)

NOTE E.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RULING ELDERS AND DEACONS.

THERE is so much popular misapprehension in regard to these two offices, that it is judged proper to make some remarks, which

shall have for their object to show the most essential and obvious points of distinction between them.

It is deeply to be regretted that the office of Deacon, in its true nature, and in its highly important and scriptural character, is not to be found in so many Presbyterian churches. In some churches this office is wholly dropped; neither the name nor the thing is to be found in them. In others, the Ruling Elders, or the members of the Church Session, are constantly styled Deacons, and scarcely ever designated by any other title; while the office really indicated in Scripture by that title is not retained. And in a third class of our churches, those who are meant for real Deacons, that is, who are chosen and set apart as such, as well as called by that name, are employed in functions for which the office of Deacon was never instituted. The cases, it is feared, are few in which the offices of Elder and Deacon are both employed together, and the appropriate functions of each distinctly maintained. It is surely desirable that clearer views, and a more correct practice, should be adopted, where mistakes, either as to name or sub-

stance, have been, heretofore, in any measure, admitted.

The nature of the Ruling Elder's office has been seen in the foregoing discourse. It has been stated that he is a spiritual ruler, who has a high trust committed to him, as an aid of the Pastor in inspecting, regulating, and authoritatively watching over all the spiritual interests of the Church with which he is connected. In a word, the office of the Ruling Elder is next to the highest in the Church; and to those who bear this office, the vitally important duties of planning and counselling for the welfare of the Church, admitting to, and excluding from, membership in it, and ordering every thing for the promotion of the purity and spiritual edification of the body of Christ, belong.

The only account that we have in Scripture of the origin of the Deacon's office is found in the following passage in the Acts of the Apostles vi. 1—6: "And in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multi-

tude of the disciples unto them and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the Apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them."

Nothing can be plainer than that these first Deacons were chosen and set apart, not to preach, not to baptize, nor to discharge any spiritual function. Indeed these functions were all absolutely precluded by the very terms, as well as by the whole spirit, of the representation given by the inspired historian. The thing complained of by the "Grecian" believers, was, not that the preaching was neglected; nor that the government and discipline of the Church was badly managed. Not a hint of this kind is given. The only

complaint was, that the poor, the widows, the pensioners on the Church's bounty, had been neglected. Prior to this it is evident that the Apostles themselves had received and disbursed the Church's charity. When collections were made, or possessions were sold, we read that the avails were "brought and laid at the Apostles' feet," who dispensed them "as every one had need." But as the number of the disciples became greatly multiplied, and the number of the applicants for charity also rapidly increased; the Apostles found that their continuing to receive and dispense the charitable funds of the Church would not only be burdensome to them, but would essentially interfere with their spiritual and more important duties. They, therefore, said, "Look ye out seven men of honest report whom we may appoint over this business, while we will give ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Is it possible to conceive of testimony more direct and unequivocal, that the officer in question was not to pursue the ministry of the word? Can any man, who is not so blindly wedded to a system, as to believe, not only without evidence, but against evidence, consider this pas-

sage as importing that deacons were appointed to be preachers of the word? Nay, is it not expressly stated that the Apostles considered the duties of this office as of such a nature that their undertaking to fulfil them, would compel them to leave preaching, and devote themselves to the “service of tables?”

The question arises, what is meant by that “serving of tables,” to which the first Deacons were so unquestionably destined. It has been supposed by many that this phrase has a reference either to the Lord’s Table, or to overseeing and supplying the domestic tables of the poor, or perhaps both. But there is much reason to believe that this is an entire mistake. The word *τραπεζα* signifies, indeed, a table, but, in this connexion, it seems obviously to mean a money-table, or a counter, on which money was laid, reckoned and dispensed. Hence *τραπεζιτης*, a money-changer, or money-merchant. See Matt. xxi. 12; xxv. 27; Mark xi. 15; Luke xix. 23. The plain meaning, then, of Acts vi. 1—6, seems to be this, “It is not reasonable that we should leave the word of God, (that is, preaching) and devote ourselves to money-tables,” that is to pecuniary affairs;

“therefore look ye out seven good and trust-worthy men, to whom we may commit the care of all these pecuniary concerns ; that we may be enabled to give ourselves entirely to the ministry of the word.”

It would seem, then, that the Deacon's office in the apostolic age, had nothing to do with the government and discipline of the Church. Those who bore this office were not intended to be the Pastor's counsellors and helpers, or to take any part in conducting the spiritual interests of the flock ; but to superintend and manage the money concerns of the Church, and especially that part of them devoted to the cause of benevolence and charity. Of course, the Deacons make no part, strictly speaking, of the Church Session. They may be present, indeed, without impropriety, when that body is convened. Perhaps it would be desirable that they should be always present, for the sake of receiving and imparting that information concerning the state of the Church which it is desirable that all the officers of the Church should possess. But they are not constituent members of that judicatory ; have no right to give votes in the transaction of its business ;

and can exercise no authority in managing the spiritual affairs of the congregation. They are, indeed, ecclesiastical men; and, in the second and third centuries, were reckoned among the *clergy*; a title which was then given to every class of church officers, to distinguish them from the *laity*, or the ordinary mass of the members of the Church. But they were ecclesiastical men of a peculiar sort, set apart for managing the funds of the Church; and many suppose that to Deacons ought to be committed all the pecuniary affairs of the Church; and that they ought to supersede the employment of Boards of Trustees, who are commonly entrusted, at present, with holding and disbursing the funds of ecclesiastical societies.

From this view of the subject, it is evident that those who bear the Deacon's office, though not charged with the same weighty concerns which devolve on the Ruling Elder, yet occupy a highly important and responsible station. And hence the Apostles, in giving counsel concerning the choice of the first Deacons, direct that they be men of tried wisdom, integrity and piety. And is it not too manifest to require argument,

that those to whose intelligence, prudence, and fidelity, the Church commits the delicate and highly responsible task of selecting and relieving the objects of her charity, ought to be wise men, tender hearted, willing to labour for the cause of Christ, and worthy of entire confidence in the management of the funds committed to their care? .

It is not only manifest, that the Deacon, in the Apostolic Church, was such as has been described; but the following extracts from early writers will plainly show that this continued to be his function for several centuries after the apostolic age. Hermas, one of the apostolical fathers, in his *Similitude*, ix. 27. tells us, that “of such as believed, some were set over inferior functions, or services, being entrusted with the poor and widows.” Origen (*Tract. 16 in Matt.*) says, “The Deacons preside over the money tables of the Church.” And again—“Those Deacons who do not manage well the money of the Church, committed to their care, but act a fraudulent part, and dispense it, not according to justice, but for the purpose of enriching themselves; these act the part of money-changers, and keepers of those tables which

our Lord overturned. For the Deacons were appointed to preside over the tables of the Church, as we are taught in the Acts of the Apostles.” Cyprian (Epist. 52.) speaks of a certain Deacon who had been deposed from his sacred Deaconship on account of his fraudulent and sacrilegious use of the Church’s money for his own private use, and for his denial of the widow’s and orphan’s pledges deposited with him.” And, in another place, (Epist. ad Rogatianum,) as a proof that his view of this office is not misapprehended, he refers the appointment of the first Deacons to the choice and ordination at Jerusalem, as recited at large in the Acts of the Apostles. It is incidentally stated in the account of the persecution under the Emperor Decius, in the third century, that, by order of the emperor, Laurentius, one of the Deacons of Rome, was seized, under the expectation of finding the money of the Church, collected for the use of the poor, in his possession. It is further stated, that this money had been in his hands; but that, expecting the storm of persecution, he had distributed it before his seizure. Ambrose, in speaking of the fourth century—the time in which he

lived—(Comment. in Ephes. iv.) says, “The Deacons do not publicly preach.” Chrysostom, who lived in the same century, in his Commentary on Acts vi. remarks, that “The Deacons had need of great wisdom, although the preaching of the gospel was not committed to them;” and observes further, that “it is absurd to suppose that they should have the offices of preaching and taking care of the poor committed to them, seeing it is impossible for them to discharge both functions adequately.” Jerome, in his letter to Evagrius, calls Deacons, “Ministers of tables and widows.” And in the Apostolical Constitutions, which, though undoubtedly spurious as an Apostolical work, may probably be referred to the fourth or fifth century, it is declared, (Lib. viii. cap. 28.) “It is not lawful for the Deacons to baptize, or to administer the eucharist, or to pronounce the greater or smaller benediction.” And, finally, in the Council of Constantinople, (in Trullo,) in the sixth century, it is expressly asserted (Can. 16) that the seven Deacons spoken of in the Acts of the Apostles, are not to be understood of such as ministered in

divine service, or in sacred mysteries, but only of such as served tables, and attended to the poor. Oecumenius, also, in commenting on the sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, says, "They laid their hands on the Deacons who had been elected, which office was by no means the same with that which obtains at the present day in the Church (i. e. under the same name,) but that with the utmost care and diligence, they might distribute what was necessary to the sustenance of orphans and widows." Other citations to the same amount might easily be produced.

It was said, in a preceding page, that some interpreters of Scripture have been of the opinion, that the "serving of tables," spoken of in Acts vi. 3, had a reference to the Lord's table, as well as to the tables of the poor. Accordingly, Justin Martyr, in his second Apology, tells the emperor, to whom he addressed it, that, in the administration of the Lord's Supper, the elements were distributed to those communicants who were present, and carried to the absent, by the Deacons. In the same service Deacons are

sometimes employed, at the present day, in Presbyterian Churches, and always in those of the Congregational order.

As was observed on a preceding page, it is very much to be regretted that an office so plainly scriptural, and so exceedingly important in various points of view as that of the Deaconship, should have been suffered, in so large a number of Presbyterian churches, not only in our own country, but also in Great Britain, in Ireland, and on the continent of Europe, to fall in a great measure into disuse. In the churches, indeed, with which the author of the foregoing discourse was connected as Pastor, fifty years ago, and with which he remained connected for twenty years, in the former part of his life, this office was faithfully maintained, and constantly and appropriately employed. And it was not until he entered on his present office, thirty years ago, that he became sensible in how few of our churches the Deaconship was retained. It is true, ever since he discovered the prevalence of this defect, he has laboured earnestly, with all the successive classes of candidates for the ministry which he has had an opportunity of address-

ing, to convince them of the unhappy character of this defect, and to urge the universal restoration of this office in all our churches. He laments that these well-meant efforts, of thirty years, have not been attended with more success; and that so large a number of our churches still remain unfurnished with a class of officers, not only appointed of God, but manifestly adapted to answer many important purposes in the sacred household. Let us hope that more attention will be paid to the supply of this deficiency in time to come. It is worthy of notice that the "Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland," recently organized, has taken measures for a "general restoration of the order of Deacons."

Various reasons have been assigned, in different Presbyterian churches, for not maintaining the Deaconship as a distinct office. Some have pleaded that they had no church-poor, properly speaking, as the secular government made provision for the support of all paupers. This plea, however, ought not to be either advanced or admitted. What though the laws of the state make provision of a decent kind for all who are recognized as poor? Are there not commonly found

within the bounds, and even among the communicants, of every church, a greater or less number of aged, infirm persons, once in better circumstances, but now reduced—widows advanced in age; persons of delicate, retiring spirits, who are struggling with the most severe privations of poverty in secret, but who cannot bring themselves to apply to the civil officer for aid as paupers; who, at the same time, would be made comparatively comfortable by a pittance now and then dispensed by a pious Deacon, in the tender and affectionate spirit of the Gospel? Surely in every church there ought to be a class of officers specially charged with a benevolent agency so constantly, and, I may say, so eminently exemplified in the primitive Church, and so well adapted to adorn the Christian character, and to promote the edification and comfort of Christian society.

When we refer to the charities of the church in the Apostolic age, and for several centuries afterwards, it is probable that very few adequately apprehend their real character or amount. The early Christians devoted themselves to the work of relieving the destitute and the miserable with a zeal, a perse-

verance, and an expensiveness which have, perhaps, never seen a parallel. The number of poor widows, children and impotent persons supported by the liberality of the Christians of Rome was almost incredibly great. In Antioch, as late as the time of Chrysostom, more than three thousand poor and distressed persons were said to be sustained by the funds of the church in that city. In short, the primitive Christians were not only in the habit of relieving their poor brethren and sisters who were residing among them, or near at hand; but they sent liberal relief to suffering churches and individuals at a distance. They redeemed captives. They provided for the comfort of convicts in the mines. They even endeavoured, at great sacrifices, to promote the welfare and enjoyment of those who exhibited nothing toward them but hatred and persecution. This feature in the character and habits of the early Christians was so pre-eminent and made so strong an impression in their favour on the surrounding population, that the emperor Julian, recommended to the heathen to imitate the Galileans in the care which they took of the poor.

It is easy to see from this statement—

which the New Testament itself in a great measure confirms,—that at the period of which we speak, the duties connected with the Deacon's office, were greatly extended and exceedingly arduous; calling for wisdom, piety, prudence, energy, and fidelity in an eminent degree. No wonder that the Apostles charged the Christian people to "look out for men of honest report," whom they might entrust with this business; and no wonder that their choice was directed to men "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost." Surely men of this character were urgently needed for labours at once so important, arduous and self-denying.

In some churches the appropriate functions of the Deaconship are assigned to the Ruling Elders, who assume the duties of both offices. This, as before remarked, has been, for a long time, extensively the case in Scotland and Ireland, and also in some Presbyterian churches on the continent of Europe; and is not unknown in our own body. To this arrangement there are strong objections. Among them are the following. (1) It is different from the Apostolic plan. (2) The duties of the Ruling Elder are amply suffi-

cient to employ the whole time of him who bears it, without laying on him the duties of another, and a very different office. (3) If there be not an absolute incompatibility between the duties of Ruling Elder and Deacon, there is, at least, such an amount of interference as is certainly undesirable, and ought by all means to be avoided. A little reflection will satisfy any one that when the same officer visits a parishioner in the double capacity of a spiritual counsellor, and an ecclesiastical almoner, the two functions may exert an unfriendly influence on each other. (4) If there be in the communion of the church candidates enough for the occupancy of both offices, is it good policy to lay both of them on the same individual? Is it not wiser to call to office a larger number of the members of the church, and thus to bring a greater number to take an interest in the affairs of the Christian community?

I will only add, in regard to the Deacon's office, that some enlightened and pious friends of the Presbyterian Church, as suggested in a preceding page, have been of the opinion, that in every church a bench of Deacons ought to take the place of the ordinary Board

of Trustees, so that all the “money tables,” or, in other words, the whole pecuniary concerns of the church may be in the hands, not only of communicants, but of ecclesiastical officers, regularly chosen, and solemnly set apart to this important service. Whatever may be thought of this plan in other respects, it certainly has much to recommend it on the score of scriptural consistency. The New Testament speaks of no other managers of church funds than Deacons. This plan also, if adopted, would certainly confer on the holders and managers of church funds a degree of ecclesiastical responsibility beyond what is included in the present method of managing the property of the church.

For a fuller view of the subject embraced in this note, see my *Essay on the Warrant, Nature and Duties of the office of the Ruling Elder, in the Presbyterian Church*—first published in 1831.

NOTE F.

THE ORDINATION OF RULING ELDERS BY THE IMPOSITION OF
HANDS.

THE ordination which Ruling Elders themselves have generally received, and ought to receive, is worthy of distinct notice. It is well known that our form of government not only requires that this class of officers shall be fairly chosen by the members of the Church, but also prescribes a form of ordination for them; a form which, as far as it goes, is well devised, impressive and excellent. I say, as far as it goes; for it has been, for many years, my settled conviction, that the ordination service for Ruling Elders given in our formularies is chargeable with a defect, which, though not essential, and therefore not a matter for which it is proper to interrupt the peace of the Church, yet appears to me incapable of a satisfactory defence. I mean that it omits to prescribe the imposition of hands in setting apart the candidates for this office.

The "imposition of hands," as a constituent part of ordination, is an old and im-

pressive rite. It was, notoriously, a familiar mode of designation to office through the whole of the Old Testament economy. It is if I mistake not, universally acknowledged to have been employed in ordaining all the Elders of the Jewish synagogue. We find it used in every ordination, without exception, the particulars of which are detailed in the New Testament history. Even in setting apart the Deacons, of which we find an account in Acts vi., nothing can be more explicit than the statement that it was done with the "laying on of hands." Now, as the Deacon's office, in the Apostolic Church, had no connexion with preaching or baptizing, as some modern sects would make us believe; but was merely an office entrusted with the supervision of "widows and tables;" surely if men selected to this office were set apart with so much formality and solemnity, it is not easy to find a solid reason why a class of purely spiritual, and more important officers, should be denied a similar form of investiture. So far, then, as we are bound to reverence and follow ancient, primitive and uniform usage, the argument seems to be

complete, that the rite in question, in ordaining Ruling Elders, ought not to be omitted.

We read, in the New Testament, of four cases or kinds of "laying on of hands." The first, by Christ himself, to express authoritative benediction; (Matt. xix. 15, Mark x. 16;) the second, in the healing of diseases, (Mark xvi. 18, Acts xxviii. 8;) the third, in conferring extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, (Acts viii. 17, xix. 6;) and the fourth, in setting apart to office, (Acts vi. 6, xiii. 3, 1 Timothy iv. 14.) The venerable Dr. Owen, in his commentary on Hebrew vi. 2, expresses the opinion, that the "laying on of hands" mentioned in that passage is to be considered as belonging to the third kind or class of cases, and, of course, as referring to the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit. Others have supposed that it rather belongs to the fourth example here enumerated, and therefore applies to the ordination of ministers. On this point I decide nothing; because no one, I think, can be warranted in deciding positively. But my reason for supposing that the imposition of hands in the ordination of church officers had no reference to the imparting of spiritual gifts, and, consequently,

ought not to be superseded on account of the ceasing of those gifts, are such as these:—

1. This rite has been employed in all ages of the Church, and under every dispensation, in setting apart persons to ecclesiastical office.

2. It is one of the most natural and significant modes of designating a person who is intended to be set apart or devoted to a particular service.

3. It was manifestly employed in a number of cases which occur in the sacred history, where no special gifts were intended to be conveyed; and therefore, though sometimes connected with those gifts, yet, certainly, not in all cases, thus connected.

4. When hands were laid on Paul and Barnabas, at Antioch, it was not that they might receive those gifts, for they were evidently possessed of them prior to this solemnity.

5. In this case, too, it is remarkable, that they seem to have been ordinary pastors and teachers who laid their hands upon one, at least, of extraordinary gifts and character.

6. And finally, in 1 Tim. v. 22, the whole rite of ordination seems to be comprehended in this act. “Lay hands suddenly on no man,” &c. And if we consider the act of laying hands on the head

of the candidate for sacred office as intended, at once, to designate his person, to express a devout and official benediction, and to indicate his entire consecration to the service of God, we could scarcely conceive of an act more simple, and yet more appropriate and full of meaning.

But reasonable, scriptural, and expressive as is the rite of laying hands on the heads of candidates for office, and constant as is its use in the ordination of those Elders who "labour in the Word and doctrine;" how comes it to pass that it should have been so generally, not to say universally, omitted among Presbyterians in the ordination of Ruling Elders? That Elders of this class were thus ordained in the apostolic Church, may be confidently taken for granted. What was done with so much marked solemnity, in the ordination of Deacons, we cannot suppose to have been omitted in setting apart men to a higher and more truly spiritual and controlling office. And yet, nothing is more certain than that, since the Reformation from Popery, when the use of this office was almost universally revived, the mode of conducting its investiture by the imposition of

hands, has been almost every where omitted. When this formality began to be omitted, and for what reason, are questions for the solution of which we do not possess definite information. What the practice of the Waldenses, and other pious witnesses of the truth, during the dark ages, who uniformly maintained the office of Ruling Elder, during all their hardships and persecutions, was, cannot now, so far as I know, be certainly determined. We must presume that they followed the Scriptural model. The Reformers received the office under consideration from those pious witnesses; and were well aware, as their writings evince, that all ordinations in the Synagogues, and in the primitive Church, had been accompanied with the laying on of hands. Still, however, while they, with one accord, retained this rite in the ordination of Teaching Elders, they seem, quite as unanimously, to have discarded it in the ordination of Ruling Elders. Of the cause of this, their writings give us no intimation; nor has it ever been my lot to hear, from any quarter, a single reason for the omission, which was in the least degree satisfactory. Still, the fact, so far as I know, is indubitable,

that from the commencement of the Reformation to this hour, in the Reformed Churches of Scotland, France, Holland, Geneva and Germany—all of which were Prebsyterian—in short, throughout the whole Presbyterian world of Europe, the ordination of Ruling Elders by the imposition of hands, has been altogether unknown. Upon the same plan our Formularies, as agreed upon by the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1788, proceeded. They made no provision for the use of this form in the ordination of this class of officers; nor was it ever introduced into our practice, until about twenty years after the adoption of her present system. Then the first specimen of it, in our, or, so far as he knows, in any Presbyterian Church, was given by the author of this Manual. In the year 1809, being called upon to constitute a new church, in a destitute settlement, he ordained the Elders with the imposition of hands. He was aware that in our Church there was no precedent for this proceeding, but so deep was his conviction that both scriptural principle and scriptural example called for this method of setting them apart, that he could no longer forbear to adopt it.

He well remembers, indeed, the doubting look, and the shaking head which he encountered on the occasion from some who considered themselves as peculiarly strict Presbyterians. Since that time, however, the practice has been gradually gaining ground, and seems now likely to obtain general prevalence in our Church.

Although, as has been already said, no reason is formally assigned, or even hinted, in the writings of the Reformers, for laying aside the imposition of hands in the ordination of Ruling Elders, it is not, perhaps, difficult to conjecture how it happened. One mistake, it is probable, naturally led to another. They began by considering the office as a temporary one, or rather, with allowing those who bore it, if they saw fit, to decline sustaining it for more than a single year. This seems to have been the original constitution of the Reformed Church of Scotland. There was a new election of these Elders annually. The same individuals, indeed, if they were acceptable to the people, and were willing to continue to serve the Church, might be re-elected for a series of years, or, if they consented, even for life. But this seldom oc-

curred. There was, for the most part, annually, a considerable change in the individuals, and annually, a new ordination. The same plan of proceeding seems to have prevailed in all the Presbyterian Churches on the continent of Europe. The tenure of the office being thus temporary, and, in many cases, but for a single year, no wonder there should seem to the discerning and pious men who took the lead in organizing the Reformed Churches, some incongruity between this annual renewal of the official investiture and obligation, and setting apart men to the office in question, each time, with the very same external formalities which attended the ordination of ministers of the Gospel, whose tenure of office was for life. This incongruity, it is probable, struck them with so much force, that they could not reconcile it with their feelings to set apart to office these temporary incumbents with the same rites and solemnity which they employed in ordaining ministers of the word and sacraments. At what period in the history of the Church of Scotland it was that the annual election of Elders was laid aside, and the office made permanent, is not with absolute certainty known. The Rev. Mr. Lorimer, in

his late valuable treatise on the Eldership in the Church of Scotland,* supposes it to have been about the year 1642, a short time before the meeting of the Westminster Assembly. But so great was the force of habit, that notwithstanding this change in the tenure of the office, the old method of ordination has been continued in Scotland to this day, and was brought by our fathers to this country, where it continued without change until 1809, when for the first time it is believed, in the Presbyterian world, the practice of laying on hands in the ordination of Elders was introduced, but has not yet become general in our Church; and so far as the present writer knows, is entirely confined to the United States. It appears, indeed, from the work of Mr. Lorimer, just quoted, that in the Presbyterian Churches both of Scotland and Ireland the popular election of Ruling Elders is decisively gaining ground, and with the most happy results; and it would also appear that in some congregations, especially in the latter country, the plan of ordaining them by the imposition of hands is likely to come into practice.

* Page 139.

It has been observed that the entire omission of the laying on of hands, in ordaining Ruling Elders, obtains universally, in all the Presbyterian Churches on the continent of Europe, as well as in Scotland. There is good evidence that the grand reason of this has been the estimate which those Churches formed of the temporary nature of the office. Thus from the *Compendium Theologiæ Christianæ* of Marck, and from the opinion of Frederick Spanheim, quoted with approbation by De Moor, the Commentator on Marck, it appears that all three of these divines of the Reformed Church, had no other objection to the laying on of hands in the ordination of Ruling Elders, than that to which a reference has been made.*

The question will of course arise, whose hands are to be laid on in the ordination of Ruling Elders? It may be answered without hesitation, the hands of the Pastor, the Moderator, and all the other members of the Church Session. The Deacons cannot unite in this solemnity. They are not spiritual officers, and of course, when present, can

* De Moor Comment. Perpet., tom. vi. p. 330.

take no part in an act which is one of spiritual authority in the Church.

When the kneeling candidate who has received this imposition of hands, rises from his knees, all the members of the Session are, of course, to take him by the hand, saying, according to our Formula, "we give you the right hand of fellowship to take part of this office with us."—It is not said, to "take part of this 'ministry' with us," as in the ordination of Pastors; plainly showing that Teaching and Ruling Elders were not regarded by the framers of our Formularies as officers of the same order.



NOTE G.

RULING ELDERS LAYING ON HANDS IN THE ORDINATION OF PASTORS.

THE first time that the writer of this manual ever read or heard, among Presbyterians, of a proposal that Ruling Elders should impose hands, with Teaching Elders, in the ordination of ministers of the Gospel,

was in the year 1831. In that year a friend and Ruling Elder, in the city of Baltimore, whom he had long known and highly esteemed, in a letter on the subject, expressed an opinion "that, as every ordination is performed by a Presbytery; as Ruling Elders are component members of the Presbytery, when judicially assembled; and as 'the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery' is the formal rite which at once accompanies and seals the ordaining act;—no good reason could be assigned why the Ruling Elders were not as much entitled to participate in that rite, as to unite in the vote which authorized it." As this position was strongly stated, and ingeniously defended, the writer confesses it struck him at first rather favourably; and he in a few days, returned to his friend a corresponding answer. When the suggestion was first presented to him, the idea which struck him most forcibly was, that the participation contended for was a mere ceremonial, which could not be supposed to be practically important, either for good or evil; and therefore, if desired by any, scarcely worth opposing. He was aware indeed, that the exercise of the right included in this claim

was wholly without precedent, so far as he knew, in any Presbyterian Church. This circumstance, the more he inquired, led to more and more doubt. Not long afterwards, it began to be reported, that one or more of our Western Presbyteries had actually admitted the claim in question; and that, in all their ordinations, the Ruling Elders were in the habit of imposing hands with the Pastors. This circumstance led the present writer to a new examination of the subject; and a number of publications in the West as well as in the East, brought under his view the principal reasonings, on both sides, and enabled him to judge of the validity and safety of the leading arguments by which the advocates of the new doctrine attempted to maintain their position. The consequence was an entire recession from the favourable opinion which he had expressed to his friend in Baltimore, and a strong conviction that the new claim could not be defended:—that it was not only contrary to all Presbyterian practice, but also to all established Presbyterian principle; and, if generally admitted, might lead to consequences highly objectionable.

In coming to this decisive conclusion, the

reasons which presented themselves to his mind were, among others, the following.

I. It is perfectly evident, from the word of God, and is accordingly recognized in our Formularies, that the Pastoral office is the highest in the Christian Church; and of course, it ought to be so exhibited, in all our ecclesiastical proceedings. Every thing, therefore, which tends to destroy all distinction between Pastors and Ruling Elders; to hold them up to view as one in order and in power, tends in fact to supersede the Elder's office in its primitive design and function. It was this mistake which had nearly banished it from the Church fourteen hundred years ago; and the recurrence of the same mistake, if adopted, will result in the same calamity again. In all cases whatsoever, this office can never occupy its appropriate place, nor render to the Church its appropriate services, when its real nature is misapprehended, and when it is confounded with another and a very different office. It is evident that the proposed innovation has a direct tendency to destroy the scriptural distinction between the two offices, and thus to produce great ecclesiastical mischief.

II. The undoubted fact, that Ruling Elders themselves were never ordained with the imposition of hands, throughout Presbyterian Christendom, he considered as affording itself conclusive proof that they did not, and could not have participated in this rite in the ordination of Pastors. That which had made no part of the ceremonial of their own induction into office, it was evident they could not regularly be allowed to partake in, in investing others with a different and a higher office.

III. The uniform historical testimony on this subject conducts us to the same conclusion. Throughout Presbyterian Christendom, a wide distinction has been constantly kept up between the offices of the Teaching and Ruling Elder; and with regard to the claim of the latter, to unite with ministers in the act of imposing hands in the ordination of ministers, nothing is more certain than that, since the Reformation from Popery, and since the restoration and establishment of the Ruling Elder's office, no instance can be found either of the claim or the exercise of this right in any Presbyterian Church on

earth, until within a very few years, in our own country.

(1.) In the Church of Scotland, under the First Book of Discipline, which occupied an authoritative place between the years 1560 and 1578, no one pretends that Ruling Elders laid on hands in the ordination of ministers. The fact is known to be that in the "First Book of Discipline," and during its reign, there was no laying on of hands by any one, in the ordination even of ministers. During that time, this rite was repudiated as unnecessary, if not improper. It was supposed to be founded, in the apostolic age, and the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, and, of course, as inappropriate and unsuitable when those gifts were considered as no longer imparted. Concerning this period, then, there is no need of adding another word. No one has ever ventured to assert, that, during that period, Ruling Elders either claimed or exercised the right in question.

(2.) It is equally certain that the same thing may be made out as to the period under the Second Book of Discipline; that is, that from the formation of that book in 1578, until the

meeting of the Westminster Assembly, in 1643, both the claim and the exercise of this right were unknown in the Church of Scotland. The contrary, indeed, has been asserted with great confidence, but without any solid foundation; nay, in the face of conclusive testimony. On this subject, no witness will be accounted either more competent or more credible than the celebrated David Calderwood, the venerable historian of the Church of Scotland, whose piety, talents, learning, and indefatigable labours and sufferings for that Church, are universally known. The *Altare Damascenum* of this truly great man was published in 1623; of course, just twenty years before the Westminster Assembly met, and while the writer was under a sentence of banishment in Holland, for his fidelity to the Presbyterian cause.

The *Altare Damascenum* is a controversial work, directed to the refutation of many adversaries. Among these, Tilenus, once a Presbyterian and Calvinistic Professor in the Seminary at Sedan, but then an apostate, bitterly and blindly bigoted against all that he had formerly espoused, was one of the most forward and conspicuous. Tilenus had

objected to the Presbyterian system, because Ruling Elders were not considered as having a right to lay on hands in ordination; that they were members of the Presbytery, and yet, in an ordination performed by the Presbytery, were not allowed to take part in this act. Calderwood explicitly admits the fact that they did not partake in this act; but denies the consequence which Tilenus draws from it. He contends that Elders might, if there were any necessity for it, lay on hands, without infringing any essential principle; as in his opinion, that act was not an essential part of ordination, and did not really convey in itself either authority or grace. But he adds, "I concede that that imposition of hands which is joined with prayer and benediction, is confined to Pastors or Teaching Elders only. Nevertheless, as a sign of consent, and assistance, the Ruling Elders also might lay on hands. They *do not* lay them on, because it is not necessary; nor, indeed, do all the Co-Presbyters of any one Classis lay on hands, but only a part in the name of the rest. Even one might act in the name of all."

"Finally," says Calderwood, "though we should grant this act (the laying on of hands)

to be a sacrament, and that the administrators of this sacrament are Pastor-Presbyters only, still the others will not thereby be excluded from the Presbytery, (1 Tim. iv. 14,) because the laying on of hands does not belong to them; for the imposition of hands may be called the "imposition of the hands of the Presbytery," although each and every one of the Presbytery have not the power of imposing hands. It is enough that the leading part of the Presbytery have that power, just as the tribe of Levi is said to offer incense, when it was the prerogative of the priests only."*

The same fact which is ascertained by the *Altare Damascenum* is also established in the *History of the Church of Scotland*, by the same illustrious author.

These passages clearly establish the fact, that, in the Church of Scotland, under the Second Book of Discipline, Ruling Elders did not lay on hands in the ordination of ministers; and they also prove that in the opinion of Calderwood, there was no impropriety in speaking of ordinations as performed

* *Altare Damascenum*, p. 689.

“by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery,” while only one class of the members of the Presbytery were empowered to impose hands. It is no argument, then, in favour of the claim which we oppose, that it is stated, in the Second Book of Discipline, when speaking of the ordination of ministers, that it was to be performed by the “laying on of the hands of the Eldership.” In other parts of the same Formulary, the “Eldership” is represented as embracing both Teaching and Ruling Elders. In fact, it is equivalent, as there used, to the term “Presbytery.” According to Calderwood’s formal explanation, then, there is no inconsistency in speaking of an ordination as performed by the Eldership, when only one class of the Elders could take part in the external rite; and of course no inconsistency in speaking of an ordination as performed by the “laying on of the hands of the Presbytery,” when only the preaching part of that body take part in the act.

Lest it should be imagined that this array of testimony is the product of American party prejudice, the following communication, from the pen of one of the most accomplished

ecclesiastical antiquaries of Scotland, now living, lately received, will banish all doubt from the mind of every candid reader.

“The first question is, ‘Did the Ruling Elders of the Church of Scotland, under the Second Book of Discipline, ever, in fact, lay on hands in the ordination of Pastors?’ As the question refers to matter of fact, it is unnecessary to enter into any examination of the Second Book of Discipline itself, which, in my humble opinion, gives no countenance to the notion that Ruling Elders should lay on hands in ordination, any more than that they should preach the sermon, or offer up the ordination prayer. In point of fact, I do not remember any instance in which such a practice was observed under the Second Book of Discipline; and I have had frequent opportunities of examining, with this or similar objects in view, such works as Calderwood’s *Larger History*; ‘*The Book of the Universal Kirk*’; Scott’s MSS. in the Advocate’s Library, (in which he gives frequent notices of the election of Elders and Deacons, during both periods of the Reformation,) and the other documents of that period.

“But the best way of arriving at satisfac-

tion on this point is by consulting the writings of our Reformers, who have treated expressly of the subject. The first authority I may cite is that of the celebrated Alexander Henderson, in the treatise which it is well ascertained was written by him, and published in the year 1641, two years before the Westminster Assembly sat down, entitled ‘The Government and Order of the Church of Scotland.’ In this treatise, which was written for the information of the English, and contains minute details of the practice observed at ordinations, he says, section, II., when speaking of the ordination of Ministers—‘The Minister cometh from the Pulpit, and, with as many of the Ministers present as may conveniently come near, lay their hands upon his head, and, in the name of Jesus, do appoint him to be the pastor of that people.’

“In another treatise, by the well known Samuel Rutherford, entitled, ‘A peaceable Plea for Paul’s Presbytery in Scotland,’ and published in 1642, the same fact is repeatedly brought out, and the practice defended on scriptural grounds, as well as the nature of the ministerial office. He says, ‘Every

where, in the word, where pastors and elders are created, there they are ordained by Pastors.’ p. 37. ‘Ordination of pastors is never given to people, or believers, or to Ruling Elders, but still to Pastors, as is clear from 1 Tim. v. 22; Titus i. 5; Acts vi. 6. Acts xiii. 3; 2 Tim i. 6; 1 Tim. iv. 14.’ p. 190. In this treatise Rutherford argues on the principle that if believers, who are not pastors may ordain pastors, they may again depose and excommunicate, which, says he, ‘are the highest acts of jurisdiction; and then may they preach and baptize, not being called ministers; then may the Sacraments be administrate, where there are no pastors, which is absurd, even to the separatists themselves.’ p. 57.

“To these authorities I may be permitted to add that of James Guthrie, of Sterling, who, in his treatise of Elders and Deacons, observes—‘Howbeit the execution of some decrees of the Church Assemblies, such as the imposition of hands—the pronouncing the sentence of excommunication—the receiving penitents—the intimation of the deposition of Ministers, and such like, do belong to *Minsiters alone.*’ Guthrie follows through-

out the rules laid down in the first and second Books of Discipline. I am not aware that in the matter of ordination, there was the slightest variation made from the order of these books, after the Westminster Assembly, which affected the point in question.

“The Second question is—‘Were Ruling Elders themselves, at any period of the history of the Church of Scotland, set apart to their own office by the imposition of hands?’ On this point the evidence, I think, is equally clear that they were *not then*, and *never have been* so set apart. In the treatise formerly mentioned, Alexander Henderson, when treating of Elders and Deacons, says—‘when the day of their admission cometh, the Pastor, having framed his doctrine to the purpose, calleth them up, and remembering both them of their duty in their charge, and the people of their submitting themselves unto them, they are solemnly received with lifted up hands, giving their promise to be faithful.’ Mr. James Guthrie, in his treatise, says—‘their admission is to be by the Minister of the congregation, or one appointed by the Presbytery, in the presence of the whole congregation, with the preaching of the

word concerning their duty, and with prayer and humiliation concerning the spirit of their calling to be poured out upon them, &c.; at which time they are solemnly to engage themselves, before the Lord, to be faithful &c.’ There is no mention of imposition of hands, and in the margin he refers to the ‘manner of electing and admitting Ministers and Elders prefixed to the Old Psalm Book,’ viz. the order adopted at the beginning of the Reformation, from which it appears that no such practice as that of ordaining Elders with imposition of hands, was known in the Church of Scotland, from 1560 down at least to 1650, about which time Guthrie wrote his treatise.

“The same views are held by George Gillespie in his ‘Aaron’s Rod Blossoming,’ and in his ‘Miscellany Questions.’

“I am not aware of any Presbyterian body whose Ruling Elders *are, or ever were,* in the habit of imposing hands in the ordination of Ministers. The subject, I understand, has been agitated in the Presbyterian Churches of England, and Ireland; and Mr. Lorimer, of Glasgow, states, in his late publication on the Eldership, that it is contem-

plated, in the Irish Church, to set Elders apart to their office in this way. But I do not recollect of ever hearing it mooted, in any quarter, to permit Ruling Elders to impose hands on Ministers. The raising of such a question may be viewed in one respect as indicating the revival of a strong Presbyterian spirit, though somewhat in the *Puseyite direction*; while, in another respect, it appears to me inconsistent with Presbyterianism, and verging towards Independency.”

I forbear to pursue the course of historical testimony further. To suppose more necessary, would be to insult the understanding of the reader. If there be truth in human testimony, Ruling Elders never laid on hands in the ordination of Ministers, in the Church of Scotland, at any period of her history.

(3.) In the acts of the Westminster Assembly the testimony borne on this subject is perfectly clear and explicit, and goes to establish the same conclusion. Concerning this point all are agreed. Nothing can be more unequivocal and decisive than the rule as laid down by that venerable body. It is in the following words: “Every minister of the word is to be ordained by imposi-

tion of hands, and prayer and fasting, by those *Preaching* Presbyters to whom it doth belong. 1 Tim. v. 22; Acts xiv. 23; and Acts xiii. 3.”

True, there were in that Assembly some who thought that Ruling Elders ought to lay on hands in the ordination of Pastors, and who contended for it. But who were they? Not Presbyterians, but Independents, who took an entirely erroneous view of the nature of the office of the Ruling Elder, and who gave it a place in their system altogether different from that which it occupies in ours. Even these, however, were very few in number, and their wishes were overruled by a great majority of the Assembly.

It has been asserted, indeed, that the Westminster Assembly decided the question, whether Ruling Elders ought to lay on hands in the ordination of Pastors, differently at two different times; at one sitting, affirmatively, and at another, negatively. This is a mistake. They never decided it in more than one way, and that was negatively.

Some have said, indeed, that the Delegates from the Church of Scotland in the Westminster Assembly were overruled in this

matter; that they had been accustomed to a different plan of ordaining Pastors from that which the Assembly sanctioned; and that they gave up their old habits, and yielded their prejudices for the sake of harmony. But there is not a shadow of pretext for this allegation. We have seen evidence altogether unquestionable that the practice alluded to had never, at any period, obtained in the Church of Scotland; and of course that all the habits of the Scotch members of the Westminster Assembly were entirely in harmony with the rule which the Assembly ultimately adopted. We have too much proof, indeed, of the powerful influence which the Scotch divines who sat in that body always maintained, to admit the thought that they were overborne in this particular. But the fact is, they had nothing as to this point to yield. They had always been accustomed to the precise principle and practice which the acts of the venerable Assembly sanctioned.

In examining the chain of testimony on the subject in question, it may not be improper to pause here and reflect on the wisdom and piety of the Westminster Assembly,

which the whole evangelical world has so much reason to remember with veneration, and to which the Presbyterian Church especially owes so large a debt of gratitude. Probably no body of divines ever convened, since the days of inspiration, of more sound and sober minds, of richer biblical and theological knowledge, and of more thorough devotedness to the cause of God and to the dictates of his word. Standing as they did at the confluence of so many channels of information concerning the whole Presbyterian world, surely their decisions concerning the functions and rights of the office under consideration, are entitled to our unfeigned respect. All their works testify that they took no narrow or hasty view of any part of the Presbyterian system; and, therefore, when they, with so comprehensive a view of Presbyterian practice in regard to this matter, decided that none but "Preaching Presbyters" could with propriety lay on hands in the ordination of "Preaching Presbyters," their judgment is surely entitled to the most respectful consideration. As a part of the chain of historical proof, it is perfectly conclusive.

(4.) With the uniform practice of the

Church of Scotland, and the decisive judgment of the Westminster Assembly, the recorded opinion of the venerable Calvin perfectly harmonized. Calvin's language on this subject is too explicit and pointed to be controverted for a moment. "The imposition of hands in the ordination of ministers is confined to Pastors alone." (Instit. lib. iv. cap. iii. sect. 16.)

(5.) With Calvin's judgment, and the uniform practice of the Church in Geneva, the judgment and practice of the French Protestant Churches, throughout their whole history, perfectly corresponded. This is explicitly attested in the "Government and Discipline of the Reformed Churches of France," as found in Quick's Synodicon in Gallia Reformata, chap. iii. From this Constitution of the French Churches it is also apparent, not only that Ruling Elders never laid on their hands in the ordination of Pastors; but also that in the ordination of Elders and Deacons there was never any imposition of hands.

(6.) The same may be said of the Church of Holland, whose early and stedfast adherence to strict Presbyterian principles is well known. All their public Formularies,

whether earlier or later; whether in relation to their Churches in Europe, or transplanted to this country, uniformly attest, that preaching Presbyters alone were in the habit of imposing hands in the ordination of Ministers of the Gospel. So far as the testimony of these documents goes, the participation of Ruling Elders in this act, was never thought of or proposed.

(7.) The same may be alleged of all the Presbyterian Churches on the continent of Europe. There is no part of their practice in regard to which they have been, from the beginning, more palpably and perfectly uniform, than in confining this part of the ordaining act to Ministers of the Gospel alone. It is firmly believed, and confidently asserted, that not a shadow of evidence can be produced that the modern claim on this subject was ever recognized or proposed in any one of the continental Churches.

So far, then, as the practice of the Presbyterian Churches of Europe goes, it has been universal and uniform. No instance can be produced of Ruling Elders being, in any case, ordained themselves with the imposition of

hands; or taking any part in this act in the ordination of Ministers of the Gospel.

(8.) When the Presbyterian system was transferred, by our venerable Fathers, from Great Britain to this country, the same practice which had prevailed in Scotland, and in all the other Reformed Churches, in regard to the point in question, was brought and established on this side of the Atlantic. Every one who has the slightest knowledge of our history, knows and acknowledges that, from the beginning of the eighteenth century when our first Presbytery was formed, to the year 1788, when our present constitution was formed, the imposition of hands was never employed in the ordination of Elders, nor were they ever known to unite with Pastors in the “laying on of hands” in the act of ordaining Pastors. These facts are so well known, and so universally acknowledged, that it is unnecessary to add another word for proving their truth.

So far, then, as historical testimony goes, it is demonstrably perfect. It is believed that in regard to no point of ecclesiastical order has there been more entire agreement in

theory, or more complete uniformity of practice, throughout Presbyterian Christendom, for more than three hundred years, than in excluding all but Ministers from laying on of hands in the ordination of Ministers. We may confidently pronounce that the whole annals of regular Presbyterianism, both foreign and domestic, will be searched in vain for a single instance of a contrary kind.

But it is said, by the advocates of the new doctrine, that the language of our present Constitution formed in 1788, very clearly gives to the Ruling Elders the power for which they contend, and that it was so framed by the venerable men who drafted it with the express design of departing from the old Scotch model, and giving this power to the Elders. The language which is alleged to convey this power is the following. "The candidate shall kneel down in the most convenient part of the Church. Then the presiding Minister shall, by prayer, and with the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery, according to the Apostolic example, solemnly ordain him to the holy office of the Gospel Ministry. Prayer being ended, he shall rise from his knees; and the Minister who pre-

sided shall first, and afterwards all the members of the Presbytery in their order, take him by the right hand, saying, in words to this purpose, ‘ We give you the right hand of fellowship, to take part of this Ministry with us.’ ” Form of Government, Chapter xv.

“ Now,” say the advocates of the new claim—“ nothing can be plainer than that the privilege of laying on hands, with the Ministers, is here expressly given to the Ruling Elders in every ordination. They are expressly declared, in Chapter x. to be members of the Presbytery; and the ordination of every Minister is said to be ‘ with the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery.’ Upon what principle, then, can we exclude from this act any who confessedly belong to the Presbytery? But, as if to preclude all doubt, it is said, that when the candidate rises from his knees, the Minister who presides, shall first, and afterwards all the members of the Presbytery in their order, take him by the right hand, saying ‘ We give you the right hand of fellowship to take part of this Ministry with us.’ Now is it not evident here, say they, upon every principle of construction, that the imposition of hands, and the

address to the candidate, on rising from his knees, belong equally to every member of the Presbytery?" Such is the reasoning constantly and confidently adopted by the friends of the new theory.

That those who employ this reasoning do not legitimately interpret the language of our Book, is evident from the following considerations.

(1.) The phrase—"members of the Presbytery" is, undoubtedly, often employed in our Form of Government, and evidently in this place, to signify none others than the Ministers, who are its permanent members. Were any one to ask—who are the members of the Presbytery of Philadelphia, when that body is not in session? every one knows that the question would be answered, by giving the names of the Ministers alone, who belong to it whether in session or not. The Elders, who occupy seats in it, when actually convened, cease to be members of the body the moment it adjourns, and may not be members again for a number of years. The meaning in this case, then, obviously is, that every permanent, every ministerial member of the Presbytery shall lay his hand on the

head of the candidate, and shall take him by the hand, when he rises from his knees.

(2.) It is evident that the phrase, “the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery,” has been constantly used, for more than three hundred years, by all the Reformed Churches, while in none of them did the Ruling Elders participate in this rite. This fact is notorious; and we have seen, in a preceding page, that the learned and pious Calderwood, while he asserts that the Ruling Elders did not, in fact, lay on hands in ordaining Pastors, yet contends that it is strictly proper to say that the ordaining act is performed “by the Presbytery,” though only a part of the body participate in it; and at once justifies and illustrates his position, by appealing to the language, in an analogous case, under the Old Testament economy.

(3.) But it is impossible legitimately to construe the language of our Formulary, as the advocates of the new doctrine do; for it is said that every member of the Presbytery, when the candidate rises from his knees, shall take him by the hand, saying, “We give you the right hand of fellowship to take part of this ministry with us.” If there were

nothing else to limit the application of the clause to the Preaching Presbyters alone, this plainly and indubitably does it. Ruling Elders are no where in our Formularies, called ministers, or their office a ministry. They do not bear the same office with Ministers of the Gospel; how, then, can they say to them, "We give you the right hand of fellowship to take part of this ministry with us? Have the Ruling Elders, the same ministry with that which Pastors receive in ordination? This is not pretended by the majority of the advocates of the new doctrine. If not, how can they with propriety speak of sharing with them their ministry? How can the former impart to the latter a ministry, or a commission, which they have never received themselves?

(4.) But that the language of our Formulary cannot possibly be interpreted as the advocates of the new doctrine insist upon doing, is perfectly evident from the practice of those who framed that language. Our opponents in this matter tell us that our fathers, in forming our present Constitution, designedly departed from the model of Scotland, and instead of saying, as our Scottish ances-

tors had done, that the imposition of hands was to be made by the "Preaching Presbyters" alone, intentionally employed language which assigns this rite to "every member" of the Presbytery; and they assure us that this change of language was expressly intended to sanction and introduce a practice different from that of our Scottish fathers. To refute this allegation nothing more is necessary than to ask, whether the venerable men who made this change of language, ever did, in fact, introduce the practice for which our opponents tell us it was intended to provide? It is perfectly notorious that they never did. But if they really meant to pave the way for a new practice, why was such a practice not only never introduced, but never so much as proposed or heard of, for more than half a century afterwards? Were they so stupid as entirely to forget their own purpose; or so wanting in integrity, as to say one thing, and mean and do another? How any thinking, candid advocate of the new scheme, can imagine that the wise and pious framers of our Constitution, deliberately modified the Formula for the express purpose of making a change in practice, which yet they never

did, in any single instance, adopt or propose, is, indeed, one of the most marvellous of all imaginations!

The inference from all these considerations is, that the Formula in our Constitution, on which so much reliance has been placed for establishing the new doctrine concerning Elders, when candidly examined, and compared with other parts of our form of government, does not really afford the least countenance to that doctrine, but rather amply sustains the old practice.

IV. It is obvious that the practical adoption of the new doctrine, even by a small portion of our judicatories, may lead to disorder and disunion, and produce an amount of ecclesiastical mischief greatly to be deplored. It has been already said, that the native tendency of the new doctrine is to do away all palpable and popular distinction between Teaching and Ruling Elders. Few of the friends of the new scheme would now be willing to say, that ministers of the Gospel might be ordained, if not as regularly, yet quite as validly by the Session of a single Church, as by a Presbytery. But surely if their fundamental principle be admitted, viz.,

that Ruling Elders have the same plenary ordaining power with ministers “of the word and doctrine;” then it is not easy to see why this consequence may not, nay, must not follow. Only let the doctrine and practice, which we oppose, be once established, and the doctrine and practice of the Sessional ordination of ministers will ultimately but inevitably follow in its train. Only yield to them their primary postulate, and they will not be able themselves, if they would, to avert the consequence which I have stated.

Nor is this the only mischief to be apprehended. There are large bodies of Presbyterians in the United States, as well as in the old world, who have adopted the same public standards, and bear the same general denomination with ourselves. Would it be wise, by adopting the innovation of which we speak, concerning a point universally established among them all, to impair their respect and confidence? This consideration, indeed ought not to weigh a feather against any thing which the word of God enjoins. But, surely, without such warrant, it is undesirable, by removing the landmarks of our fathers, to raise barriers between ourselves

and sister Churches; especially when they are sustained by the universal and uniform practice of centuries.

But departing from the practice of sister Churches, is not so great an evil as discord and disunion among ourselves. We congratulate ourselves, as Presbyterians, on having a system which binds all the parts of our whole Church together in one harmonious plan of doctrine, government and discipline. So that any brother, whether Minister, Elder, or private member, who shall remove from one part of our bounds to another, feels sure of meeting, every where with the same rules, and the same general practice. It is perfectly manifest, as far as the experiment has yet been made, that a large majority of our beloved Church is decidedly adverse to the proposed innovation. And yet we are told, that there are Presbyteries who have actually adopted that innovation, and practised upon it; and that there are Ministers and Elders who, impatient of waiting until their object can be attained with the consent of the whole Church, and by the adoption of a general rule, have expressed a determination either not to attend the judicatories of the Church

at all, or to go forward and assume the right contended for, without permission. It is to be regretted that such a spirit as this should find any place in the Presbyterian Church. It is especially to be regretted that brethren claiming to be, by way of eminence, consistent Presbyterians, should cherish such a spirit themselves, and take pains to foment and encourage it in others. Where such a spirit reigns, order, peace and edification cannot dwell. Is it worth while to distract and divide the Church by keeping up a controversy, for the sake of controversy, on a point which is opposed to the whole Presbyterian world? Is it prudent to introduce theories and plans of ordination which, in conceivable cases, may render the orders conferred by some Presbyteries, questionable, if not spurious in the view of the majority? In the "old paths," as to this matter, there is safety. In regard to that which is proposed, no one can count the cost, or see the end.

NOTE H.

THE POWER OF RULING ELDERS TO DO GOOD.

It is deeply to be lamented that more adequate views of what an active and devoted Ruling Elder has in his power, are not familiar to the minds of those who bear this office, as well as to the mass of the Christian people. "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." Were the Ruling Elders and the private members of our churches, as intent on turning this important office to the best account; as intent on promoting the spiritual benefit of those around them; as fruitful of expedients, and as watchful for opportunities of doing good, as the avaricious man is to make money, or the vain-glorious and ambitious man to invite praise, and to court popularity, what a different aspect would both the Church and world wear? The truth is, no human being lives an hour, either in society or in solitude, without enjoying an opportunity, if he have a heart for the purpose, either of planning or executing some effort to do good to the souls or bodies of men, or both.

If the strong moral impulse to make the attempt, and the disposition to pray for the Divine blessing upon it, were always present, every hour might be marked not only with benevolent effort, but also with blessed results.

The pious and eloquent Dr. Chalmers, in his well known work on "The Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns," having occasion to speak of the Ruling Elders and Deacon's offices, and of the strong objections to their being both united in the same person;—in reference to the former office, makes the following remarks.

"Let an Elder count it his duty to hold a habitual intercourse of kindness with the people of his district, and for this purpose, devote but a few hours in the week to their highest interest; out of the fulness of a heart animated with good will to man, and, in particular, with that good will which points to the good of their eternity; let him make use of every practical expedient for spreading among them the light and influence of the Gospel; let it be his constant aim to warn the unruly, to comfort the afflicted, to stimulate the education of children, to press the

duty of attending ordinances, to make use of all his persuasion in private, and of all his influence to promote such public and parochial measures as may forward the simple design of making our people good, and pious and holy;—then, though he should go forth among them stript of power and patronage, and pecuniary administration;—though his honest and Christian good will be all that he has to recommend him; and the whole armoury of his influence among the people be reduced to the simple element of good will and friendship, and personal labour, and unwearied earnestness in the prosecution of their spiritual welfare;—yet, with these, and these alone, will any of our Elders find a welcome in every heart, and a home in every habitation.

“All the dispensations of Providence, and all the great events in the train of human history, are on the side of the Christian philanthropist. He has only to watch his opportunity, and there is not a family so hardened in the ways of impiety, where he may not in time establish himself. The stoutest hearted sinner he may have to deal with, must, in a few little years, meet with some-

thing to soften and to bring him down. Death may make its inroads upon his household, and disease may come, with its symptoms of threatening import upon his own heart; and in that bed of sickness which he dreads to be his last, may the terrors and reproaches of conscience be preparing a welcome for the Elder of his district; and he who was wont to laugh the ministrations of his Christian friend away from him, will at length send an imploring message, and supplicate his prayers. Such is the omnipotence of Christian charity. At the very outset of its enterprise, it will find a great and an effectual door opened to it; and in the course of months, its own perseverance will work for it; and Providence will work for it; and the mournful changes which take place in every family will work for it; and all the frailties of misfortune and mortality to which our nature is liable, will work for it; and thus may one single individual, acting in the capacity of a Christian friend, and ever on the alert, with all the aid of Christian counsel, and all the offices of Christian sympathy, in behalf of his assigned population, be the honoured instrument of reviving another spirit, and setting

up another style of practice and observation in the midst of them. Thus may he obtain a secure hold of ascendancy over the affections of hundreds, and like unto a leaven for good, in the neighbourhood which has been entrusted to his care, may he, by the blessing of God, infuse into that mass of human immortality with which he is associated, the fermentation of such holy desires, and penitential feelings, and earnest aspirations, and close inquiries after the truth, as may at length issue in the solid result of many being called out of darkness into light, of many being turned unto righteousness.

“The Christian Elder, who has resigned the temporalities of his office, should not think that on that account he has little in his power. His presence has a power. His advice has a power. His friendship has a power. The moral energy of his kind attentions and Christian arguments has a power. His prayers at the bed of sickness, and at the funeral of a departed parishioner, have a power. The books that he recommends to his people, and the minister that he prevails on them to hear, and the habit of regular attendance upon the ordinances to which he intro

duces them, have a power. His supplications to God for them, in secret, have a power. Dependence upon Him, and upon his blessing, for the success of his own feeble endeavours, has a power. And when all these are brought to bear upon the rising generation; when the children have learned both to know and to love him; when they come to feel the force of his approbation, and on every recurring visit, receive a fresh impulse from him to diligence at school, and dutiful behaviour out of it; when the capabilities of his simple relationship thus come to be estimated, it is not saying too much to say, that with such as him there lies the precious interest of the growth and transmission of Christianity, in the age that is now passing over us; and that, in respect to his own selected neighbourhood, he is the depositary of the moral and spiritual destinies of the future age.”*

These remarks of the venerable and eloquent Patriarch of the Scottish Church, ought not to be read by any Ruling Elder without receiving a new impulse in the great work of doing good; without feeling that every day he

* Christian and Civic Economy, &c., vol. i. 291—295.

lives, and every house he enters, may afford an opportunity of benefiting some soul; of recommending religion; of admonishing and quickening some member of the Church; or enlightening and impressing the minds of some hitherto careless or profane. One would think that a Christian man, occupying such an important office, if he had a heart habitually warmed with the love of Christ and of souls, would be constantly watching for opportunities and means of opposing sin and error, and leading men to the Saviour.

But not only is it in the power of Elders and Deacons, in virtue of their respective offices, to do a greater amount of good than human arithmetic can measure; but the fact is, that private members of the Church may promote the spiritual interests of those around them to an extent which is seldom realized. Pious laymen have been sometimes heard to complain, that they were excluded from many opportunities of doing good to those around them, by the fact that their encroaching on the functions of ministers of the Gospel, would be considered as disorderly and inadmissible. But surely there never was a complaint more unreasonable, or more des-

titute of solid foundation, than this. What is there to prevent any Christian man, who has a heart, and adequate intelligence for the purpose, from employing as many hours every day as he has to spare, in visiting families; in catechizing and instructing the young; in visiting the sick and dying; in circulating Bibles, Tracts, and other pious books; in conversing with his neighbours on the great subjects of moral and religious duty; in promoting the cause of temperance, and of the Sabbath; in striving to win profligates, young and old, to virtue and piety; and, in a word, in watching for every opportunity of doing good to the souls and bodies of his fellow-men? Is not every one who professes to be a disciple of Christ, whether in office or not, bound, every day, and wherever he may be, to do all in his power for winning souls to Christ, and extending the reign of his grace? What is it that prevents every professing Christian from being thus active and thus useful? He is surely not straitened in his Master, or in the nature of his duty, but in himself. The truth is, the most enlightened, devoted and gifted layman that ever lived, without invading the

functions which belong to the sacred office, may find enough, every day, in his own neighbourhood, to employ every hour, and to put in requisition all his gifts and graces. To imagine that the contrary is the case, and to be ready to complain of it, betrays a spirit like that of the men who prate about universal benevolence, while they entirely neglect those calls to do good in detail which lie unheeded at their door. Let those laymen who imagine that they have no scope for pious and benevolent efforts, read the life of *Harlan Page*, and learn to correct their mistake. They will see, from the Memoir of that excellent man, how much a private Christian may do for the benefit of his fellow-men, and for the promotion of his Master's glory. For although he became a Ruling Elder before his death, and seems to have been both active and useful in this office, the greater part of his religious life was passed without office in the Church. Yet in this situation he was so watchful for opportunities, and so unwearied in his efforts to do good to the souls of those to whom he could obtain access, that he could cherish the belief, on his death-bed, that he had been instrumental in the hopeful

conversion of more than a hundred souls. Would that all ministers of the Gospel could say as much ! I was never so happy as to see or know that worthy man ; but I could wish and pray that his mantle might fall upon thousands in the Eldership and out of it. It would be a happy day for the American Church.

Nor ought even pious females to consider themselves as excluded from the great work of promoting the spiritual welfare of those around them. True, their sex excludes them, not only from the sacred desk, and from the office of public instruction in every form, but also from some of the modes of doing good which are open to private Christians of the other sex. But still a large field of useful activity lies before them, which they may not only lawfully enter, but which it may with truth be said, they are peculiarly adapted to occupy. In almost every populous settlement in our country, there are families in which there are no Bibles ; in which, if that precious book were possessed, there are none able to read it ; families in which there are irreligious wives and children ; families in which sickness and death invite

that appropriate instruction and counsel, and that tender sympathy which are so adapted to conciliate, to soften, and to impress; families which are seldom or never found in the house of God; families to which the gift of the Bible, the instructive volume, and the pious tract might prove of inestimable value. These families present scenes in which the benevolence and piety of intelligent females might have appropriate and ample scope, to which the delicacy and tenderness of the female heart are peculiarly adapted, and in which the voice, the gentleness, and the whole manner of female kindness are fitted to make an impression such as nothing else in this world is equally adapted to impart.

We have seen a pious intelligent female enter a dwelling where ignorance and irreligion reigned; where there was no Bible, and no ability to read it, if it had been there. We have seen her, taking her Bible in her hand, enter that dwelling, and gathering around her such members of the family as she found at home, with a benevolent smile on her countenance, and with the law of kindness on her lips, read to them portions of sacred Scripture, accompanied with such

simple and intelligent remarks as circumstances seemed to demand. We have seen her, as she moved about among her neighbours, in all the gentleness and attraction of her sex, presenting a catechism to one, a pious tract to another, a seasonable reproof to a third, and uniting in prayer with a mother and her children, unable or unwilling to pray for themselves. We have seen her by the bedside of the sick and dying, not only ministering to the physical wants of the sufferers, but endeavouring to insinuate spiritual instruction and consolation into their minds. In short, we have seen her in all the intercourse of life, giving utterance to good sentiments, instructing the ignorant, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, reproving sin, recommending pious books, leading the careless to the house of God; and thus becoming, perhaps, to many individuals, the means of eternal blessedness. Who that has read the *Memoirs of Isabella Graham*, can doubt that an enlightened and pious female has it in her power, humanly speaking, to do an amount of good to the Church and to her generation which no earthly mind can measure? That illustrious woman, for more than

thirty years, adorned and blessed the city of New York, where her bright and steady Christian example, and her enlightened, active and unwearied benevolence, might really be said to form an era in the American annals of female benevolence. See the Memoirs alluded to; and also the excellent and eloquent sermon preached on the occasion of her death, in 1814, by her Pastor, the Rev. John M. Mason, D. D.

I have only to add here, what I should deem it a defect to omit, that whatever individuals in any church, whether Elder, Deacon, or private member, of either sex, may engage in any systematic attempt to do good, by visiting, catechizing &c., ought, in all cases in which it is practicable, to consult their Pastor, and ascertain that their plans do not interfere with his. Every Pastor who is faithful and active, is engaged in plans of doing good, of which all the members of his flock may not be aware. Of course, as he is, or ought to be, the centre of information, of counsel, and of effort for promoting the great interests of knowledge, order and piety among his people; while none ought to be kept back from pious and benevolent action

by this consideration, yet all ought to consult with him, and to take care that they do nothing to thwart either his wishes or his efforts in the great work of doing good. If his wishes and efforts are either deficient or ill directed, let those who so consider them, endeavour, with all due respect and fidelity, to bring about a correction of the evil.

THE END.

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